CRUISES

& PORTS OF CALL 2010

From U.S. and Canadian home ports to the Caribbean, Alaska, Hawaii & more

Frommer's

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Cruises & Ports of Call

From U.S. & Canadian Home Ports to the Caribbean, Alaska, Hawaii & More

2010

by Heidi Sarna & Matt Hannafin

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How to Contact Us

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to:

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Cruising 2010: Fewer Lines, Bigger Ships

If you've picked up this book, it's unlikely we'll have to talk you into a cruise—that idea is probably already in your head. Besides, it's not our job to talk you into anything. We know some people just love traveling by ship and others just hate it. We also know that some people just *assume* they'd hate it, without having the full story.

Because, y'know, it's a pretty big story, and new chapters are being added every year. Time was the typical cruiser profile was totally predictable: mostly older folks plus a smattering of honeymooners and party-makers who hit the high seas. They're all still there, but today, so is everyone else: young families, young professionals, middle-aged couples in Harley shirts, baggy-jeans teens, 50-something gym rats, multigenerational family groups, Democrats, Republicans, Rastafarians, and a corps of Canadians, Brits, and other "others" to help us all get along.

In a certain sense, it's an old-fashioned kind of vacation, a shout back to the European Grand Tours, with travelers hitting a region's high points in quick succession—bam, bam, bam—then getting back aboard ship to socialize with people who were strangers until circumstance pushed them together. In another sense, though, today's cruise lines could hardly be more modern, their newest ships packed with every possible widget to win new customers and turn them into regulars. We'll be honest, though. It's not that stuff that grabs us—not the surfing simulators or sushi bars, not the rock-climbing walls or hot-rock massages. It's simply being at sea on a ship. It's the teak decks, the thick steel hull, the smell of the sea, and that distant rumble of the engines way down below. It's the feeling that you've been untethered from the world, as you stand on deck at night, lean over the rail, and watch the waves break around your ship's bow as it heads . . . somewhere. The sea: It's a powerful thing.

CRUISING 2010: PRICES FALL—SO DO SOME CRUISE LINES

The past year was a funny one—if *funny* can be understood to mean financially wobbly, uncertain, sweaty, and kinda grim all around. The world financial crisis affected the cruise lines just as it did every other business, with more people opting to stuff their vacation fund in the mattress rather than spend it on a week in the Caribbean. At press time, things were bad but could be a lot worse: None of the major cruise lines looked sick unto death, and those travelers who felt confident were raking in some great deals, even in the luxury segment of the market, which is usually resistant to financial shocks.

The year was not without its losses, though. In November 2008, after months of rocky financials, river cruise line **Majestic America** closed up shop after less than 3 years. The loss was especially grievous because Majestic owners Ambassadors International had created the line by buying and then dissolving the

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legendary Delta Queen Steamboat Company and smaller river line American West Steamboat Company. Majestic's dissolution—along with the closing of much smaller river line **RiverBarge Excursions**—means that the United States is without a company providing regular multinight service on the Mississippi and its tributaries for the first time since the early 19th century.

On a personal note, 2009 also saw the loss of one of our favorite ships of all time, Imperial Majesty's ***Regal Empress.*** Built in 1953 as a transatlantic liner, *Empress* survived longer than any other vessel of her vintage, living out her last quarter century with a variety of small, budget cruise lines: first Commodore, then Regal, then Imperial Majesty. She was finally undone not by age but by rules: Changes required by new international safety regulations in 2010 would have been too pricey, so in May she was finally sent to the ship breakers in Alang, India.

THE RETURN OF BIG—AS IF IT EVER WENT AWAY

Get ready for big: Even as the world struggles with its accounts, several of the cruise lines are about to introduce truly unbelievably enormous ships that they ordered when everyone was feeling flush. The *average* newly built vessel will carry literally twice the number of passengers as the average ship built a decade ago, but several of the biggest will be literally three times the size of a 1990s cruiser, and more than five times the size of the legendary *Titanic.*

Biggest of the big is Royal Caribbean's ***Oasis of the Seas,*** a 220,000-ton, 5,400-passenger behemoth that's a full 25% larger than the current heavyweight champs, Royal's own *Freedom* and *Independence of the Seas.* Debuting just after this book goes to press, she'll be the first cruise ship ever set up with distinct "neighborhoods" of public rooms and attractions, each offering a very different experience. There will also be an onboard carousel and zipline, and a real park with trees. Oasis indeed.

The other enormo-ship debuting for the 2010 season is NCL's ***Norwegian Epic,*** a 150,000-ton, 4,200-passenger monster that's shaping up to be nearly as distinctive as *Oasis,* with the majority of its innovations being in attitude rather than big-ticket attractions (think hipster-oriented budget cabins with mood lighting, an outdoor nightclub dealie, and the cruise world's first ice bar).

At the other end of the spectrum, 2010 will be the first full year of service for a couple of much smaller, more refined vessels. Ultraluxury line Silversea Cruises will be showing off its 36,000-ton, 540-passenger ***Silver Spirit***—the largest ship in its fleet, but still smaller than anything

operated by the American mainstream lines. Ditto for ultraluxury Seabourn, which is debuting its 32,000-ton, 450-passenger ***Seabourn Odyssey*** around the time this book goes to press.

FINDING A SHIP IS EASY, BUT WILL YOU CLICK?

Comparing cruise ships and lines is like scanning an online dating site: "Attractive young cruise ship with nice body and good personality seeks friend for dating, possible relationship." The ship looks good, but we all know how photos can lie. Ditto for the descriptions.

Just like in dating, there are ships that you'll get along with and ships that you won't. It's all a matter of personality. Your dream ship is probably out there, somewhere—you just need to figure out what you want. If those huge Vegas-style floating resorts advertised on TV aren't your cup of tea, there are also quiet, refined ships where you're left to do your own thing, with outstanding service staff standing by in case you need anything—anything at all. Other ships are more like intimate B&Bs, where the vibe is casual, the cabins are cozy, and the focus is all on history, culture, and the outdoors. A few are honest-to-God sailing ships that afford nostalgic adventure.

Chances are there's a ship out there with your name on it, and as your cruise matchmakers, we're here to help you wade through the different options and experiences and meet the cruise of your dreams. To do this, we've divided the cruise lines into three main categories—**mainstream lines** (chapter 6), **ultraluxury lines** (chapter 7), and **small ships, sailing ships, and adventure cruises** (chapter 8)—and developed a rating system that judges them only against other ships in the same category: megaship against megaship, luxe against luxe, small ship against small ship.

THE REAL SCOOP ON CRUISE PRICES

Cruise pricing is really . . . well, dumb. Beyond the fuzzy math that often makes the new ships the cheapest to book, you also have the problem of brochure prices. Check out Brochure X, which lists a weeklong sailing at $1,900 per person for a standard outside cabin. Now click over to your favorite travel agency's website and you'll probably see that same cruise going for $699. What gives?

Just like new-car prices, cruise line brochure prices are notoriously inflated—go figure. Generally speaking, you can just ignore brochure rates except when researching the smaller, more niche-oriented cruise lines. That's what we've done in this book: Instead of printing unrealistic brochure prices, we've partnered with the agency **Just Cruisin' Plus** to provide you with the **actual prices** consumers were paying for cruises aboard all the ships reviewed in this book. Each review shows approximately how much you can expect to pay for an inside cabin (one without windows), an outside cabin (with windows or a balcony), and a small suite.

The Best of Cruising

People are always asking us about our favorite ships, and we always say, "Well, what do you like to do when you're *not* on a ship?" In this section we've broken out different kinds of cruises, interests, and destinations to help you find a ship that best matches what you're looking for. You'll find complete information on each pick in part 2, "The Cruise Lines & Their Ships," and part 3, "The Ports."

1 Our Favorite Mainstream Ships

Mainstream ships are the big boys of the industry, carrying the most passengers and providing the most diverse cruise experiences to suit many different tastes, from party-hearty to arty-farty. Note that we don't include Royal Caribbean's enormo-size ***Oasis of the Seas,*** which launches after this book goes to press. Even money says that ship makes the list next year.

- **Celebrity's Solstice class and Millennium class:** Celebrity's new *Solstice* and upcoming sister ship *Equinox* are the most beautifully designed megaships we've ever seen, encapsulating all that was great about the line's older Millennium-class and Century-class vessels while moving logically and stylistically into the future. The Millennium-class ships are still pretty great themselves, and we also have a giant soft spot for the 1997-vintage *Mercury.* See p. 130 and 134.
- **NCL's *Jewel, Pearl,* and *Gem:*** NCL's best ships yet, these nearly identical ships combine an incredible number of dining choices, great entertainment, an always-casual vibe, and a decor and ambience that are just plain fun. They have the best beer-and-whiskey bars at sea, some of the best entertainment, comfortable cabins, and an overall feel that's more contemporary than the competition. See p. 205.
- **Princess's Diamond class and Grand class:** Princess's huge but cozy *Diamond Princess* and *Sapphire Princess* are its most beautiful ships to date, combining gorgeous exterior lines with wood-heavy, old-world lounges and a great covered promenade that lets you stand right in the ship's prow. Kudos also go to the line's similar Grand-class ships, especially those launched since 2004: *Caribbean Princess, Crown Princess, Emerald Princess,* and *Ruby Princess.* See p. 232 and 229.
- **Cunard *Queen Mary 2:*** *QM2* has her very own niche in the cruise world. With two classes on board—the hoity-toity luxury "Grill Class" with its special suites, restaurants, and lounges, and the normal areas for everybody else—this ship gives you a pretty good idea of life aboard the old-time ocean liners. And it even looks like one, at least on the inside. See p. 154.
- **Royal Caribbean's Radiance class:** The most elegant vessels Royal Caribbean has produced to date, *Radiance, Brilliance, Serenade,* and *Jewel of the Seas* combine sleek, seagoing exteriors with nautically themed interiors and acres of windows.

2 Best Luxury Cruises

Here's the very best for the cruiser who's used to traveling deluxe and who doesn't mind paying for the privilege. These ships have the best cuisine, accommodations, and service at sea.

- **Silversea *Silver Shadow* and *Silver Cloud:*** Silversea is the best of the highbrow small-ship luxury lines, with its exquisite cuisine, roomy suites, over-the-top service, and niceties such as complimentary free-flowing champagne. See p. 311.
- **SeaDream Yacht Club *SeaDream I* and *II:*** What's not to love? These cool 110-passenger yachts are elegant but casual, and carry along jet skis, mountain bikes, and kayaks for jaunts around such ports as St. Barts and Jost Van Dyke. See p. 303.
- **Crystal *Symphony* and *Serenity:*** Carrying 922 to 1,070 passengers, these are the best midsize ships out there, big enough to provide lots of dining, entertainment, and fitness options, and small enough to bathe passengers in luxury. See p. 277 and 274.
- **Regent Seven Seas *Navigator* and *Voyager:*** Not only are cabins aboard these midsize 490- and 700-passenger, all-suite ships roomy, but their huge bathrooms are also fabulous. To top it off, food and service on both are among the very best at sea. See p. 286 and 284.

3 The Most Romantic Cruises

Of course, all cruises are romantic when you consider the props they have to work with: the undulating sea all around, moonlit nights on deck, cozy dining and cocktailing, cozy cabins. Here are the best lines for getting you in the mood.

- **Star Clippers:** With the wind in your hair and sails fluttering overhead, the top decks of the tall-masted *Royal Clipper* provide a most romantic setting. Below decks, the comfy cabins, lounge, and dining room make these ships the most comfortable adventure on the sea. See p. 356.
- **Cunard:** Like real royalty, *Queen Mary 2* was born with certain duties attendant to her station, and one of the biggest is to embody the romance of transatlantic travel and bring it into the new century. Take a stroll around that promenade deck, dine in that fabulous dining room, and thrill to be out in the middle of the ocean on nearly a billion dollars' worth of Atlantic thoroughbred. See p. 154.
- **SeaDream Yacht Club *SeaDream I* and *II:*** With comfy Balinese daybeds lining the teak decks, champagne flowing freely, and toys like MP3 players and high-powered binoculars at your fingertips, these 110-passenger playboy yachts spell romance for the spoiled sailing set. See p. 303.
- **Windstar Cruises:** Windstar's tall-masted *Wind Surf* and *Wind Spirit* offer a truly unique cruise experience, giving passengers the delicious illusion of adventure and the ever-pleasant reality of great cuisine, service, and itineraries. See p. 363 and 365.
- **Sea Cloud Cruises:** Really, when it comes right down to it, what setting is more movie-star romantic than a zillionaire's sailing yacht? That's what you get with *Sea Cloud,* once owned by Edward F. Hutton and Marjorie Merriweather Post, with some cabins retaining their original grandeur. See p. 350.

4 Best Cruises for Families with Kids

The kids are boss, or so you'd think, the way cruise lines cater to families these days. All the lines mentioned here have supervised activities for three to five different age groups between ages 2 or 3 and 17, plus well-stocked playrooms, group and/or private babysitting, wading pools, kids' menus, and cabins that can accommodate three to five people. The section, "Cruises for Families," in chapter 1, also has more info.

- **Disney Cruise Line:** This family magnet offers the most sophisticated, flexible, and well-thought-out kids' program in the cruise world, bar none. From the huge play areas and family-friendly cabins (the majority have two bathrooms—a sink and toilet in one and a shower/tub combo and sink in the other) to the baby nursery and the ubiquitous Mickey, it all spells success. Plus, the 3- and 4-night cruises to The Bahamas aboard the *Disney Wonder* are marketed in tandem with stays at Walt Disney World, so you can have your ocean voyage and your Cinderella Castle too. See p. 158.
- **Royal Caribbean:** The huge Voyager-class ships are truly theme parks at sea, with features such as onboard rock-climbing walls, ice-skating rinks, in-line skating rinks, miniature golf, burger-joint diners, and Disney-esque Main Streets running down their centers, along with parades and other entertainment throughout the day. The newer *Freedom, Liberty,* and *Independence of the Seas* go one better, adding a top-deck water park and surfing simulator. All this plus bigger-than-normal kids' playrooms, teen centers, wading pools, video game rooms, and regulation-size basketball, paddle ball, and volleyball courts. The Radiance-class ships are also a great family choice, and the line's older ships also have impressively roomy kids' facilities. See p. 243.
- **Carnival Cruise Lines:** While Carnival's let-the-good-times-roll attitude appeals to adults, the line also does a particularly fine job with kids. Several hundred kids per cruise is pretty normal, with as many as 800 to 1,000 on Christmas and New Year's cruises. You'll find the biggest and brightest playrooms in the fleet on the new *Carnival Dream* and *Carnival Splendour* as well as the Conquest-class vessels, with computer stations, a climbing maze, a video wall showing movies and cartoons, arts and crafts, and oodles of toys and games, plus great water slides out on the main pool deck. Carnival's Destiny- and Spirit-class ships are pretty great, too. See p. 101.
- **Princess Cruises:** The Grand-, Diamond-, and Coral-class ships each have a spacious children's playroom, a sizable and fenced-in outside deck for toddlers, and another for older kids, with a wading pool. Teen centers have computers, video games, and a sound system, and the ones on the Grand-class ships even have teen hot tubs and private sunbathing decks. See p. 221.
- **Norwegian Cruise Line:** The kids' facilities on *Norwegian Dawn, Star,* and *Spirit* are fantastic, with a huge, brightly colored crafts/play area, a TV corner full of beanbag chairs, an enormous ball-jump/play-gym, a teen center, and a huge outdoor play/pool area. Parents will appreciate the many restaurant options on board, while kids can dine in tiny chairs at a kid-size buffet of their own. *Norwegian Jewel, Pearl, Jade, Gem,* and *Pride of America* have good

indoor playrooms, but their tiny outdoor play areas are a disappointment. See p. 197.

- **Cunard:** Though you'd hardly expect it from such a seriously prestigious line, the *QM2* has a great program and facilities for kids, starting at age 1. Aside from Disney, no other line provides such extensive care for children so young. There's even a special daily children's teatime that's perfect as an early dinner, and the children's programming is free of charge until midnight daily.

5 Best Cruises for Pure Relaxation

Sometimes it's all about doing absolutely nothing, but some ships are better at letting you do nothing (in style and comfort) than others.

- **SeaDream Yacht Club:** SeaDream's two intimate, 110-passenger yachts deliver an upscale yet very casual experience without regimentation. Cabin beds are fitted with fine Frette linens, but the best snooze on board is to be had in one of the 18 queen-size, Bali-style sun beds that line each vessel's top deck. Each has an extrathick mattress, teak bed tables, and sea views, and is ensconced in its own raised, semipartitioned "bedroom." Reading lights are provided at night, and some guests just end up sleeping out here. See p. 298.
- **Oceania Cruises:** Aboard Oceania's midsize, classically styled ships, the dress code is "country-club casual" at all times; you can show up for dinner whenever you like; activities and entertainment are small scale and personal; itineraries visit many quiet, refined ports; and the cabin beds are some of the best at sea. For the ultimate experience, you can rent a private on-deck cabana with retractable shade roof, plush daybed built for two, and a dedicated attendant to bring food and drink, spritz you with cold water, and order up massages. Step aboard, take a deep breath, and *relax.* See p. 214.
- **Celebrity Cruises:** If your idea of relaxation involves regular massages; lolling around in ornate steam rooms, mud baths, and hydrotherapy pools; and then letting your limbs tingle in gorgeous solariums, Celebrity's Solstice- and Millennium-class ships are tops. On *Solstice,* you can even wiggle your toes on a real grass lawn, right at the top of the ship. At night, if you've booked one of the line's Concierge-Class suites, you can choose your preferred pillow from a whole menu of different varieties. See p. 123.
- **Star Clippers:** You won't find better ships for the Caribbean, really, than Star Clippers' tall-masted modern clipper ships, with acres of sail shining in the sun and you below them in a deck chair, listening to sailors working the winches, heading for the next small yachting port. No megaship bustle here. See p. 351.

6 Best Dining Experiences

Here's where you'll find the finest restaurants afloat, with food rivaling that in the world's major cities.

- **Silversea Cruises:** The candlelit La Terrazza restaurant is home for some of the best Italian cuisine at sea. Excellent wines accompany dinner and are included in the cruise rates. A second alternative venue allows a new twist on cruise dining, with menus that pair food with wine rather than

the other way 'round (though those wines will cost you). See p. 306.

- **Crystal Cruises:** While all the food you'll get on these ships is first-class, their reservations-only, sleek Asian specialty restaurants overseen by master chef Nobuyuki "Nobu" Matsuhisa are the best at sea. An Asian-themed buffet lunch, served at least once per cruise, gives passengers an awesome spread, from jumbo shrimp to chicken and beef satays to stir-fry dishes. See p. 268.
- **Regent Seven Seas Cruises:** The award-winning chefs aboard this line's ships produce artful culinary presentations that compare favorably to those of New York's or San Francisco's top restaurants, and the waiters are some of the industry's best. See p. 279.
- **Seabourn Cruise Lines:** There's nothing quite like dining at the outdoor venue called Restaurant 2, which serves five- to six-course tasting menus for only about 70 guests a night. With the ship's wake just below, it's a rare opportunity to dine with the sea breezes and starry night sky surrounding you. See p. 288.
- **Celebrity Cruises:** It doesn't get much better than the alternative restaurants on the Millennium-class ships, all of them designed to mimic dining experiences aboard the golden-age ocean liners of yesteryear. *Millennium*'s Olympic restaurant, for instance, boasts the actual gilded French walnut wood paneling used aboard White Star Line's *Olympic,* sister ship to *Titanic.* A highly trained staff dotes on diners with table-side cooking, musicians play elegant period pieces, and the entire decadent experience takes about 3 hours. See p. 123.
- **Oceania Cruises:** Oceania's dining experience is near the top in the mainstream category, with menus created by renowned chef Jacques Pepin and passengers able to choose between four different restaurants, all of them excellent. Service is doting and fine-tuned, even at the casual semibuffet dinner option on an outdoor terrace that's elegant and totally romantic at sunset. See p. 214.
- **Norwegian Cruise Line:** NCL gets onto this list by sheer weight of numbers. The line's megaships each have between 8 and 10 different dining options, including multiple main dining rooms, multiple specialty restaurants, *teppanyaki* rooms, and casual options. While the fare in the main dining rooms is average, it's quite good in some of the alternative venues, including the sushi bar and the elegant French/Continental Le Bistro. See p. 197.

7 Best Cruises for the Party Set

Whether you're traveling solo or with your significant other, these ships can keep you in a party mood all day and night.

- **Costa Cruises:** Imagine a Carnival ship hijacked by an Italian circus troupe: That's Costa. More than anything else, the line is known for its lineup of exuberant and often Italian-inspired games and other participatory activities, and it attracts passengers who love to participate. The words of the day are fun, festive, and international. See p. 140.
- **Carnival Cruise Lines:** Lots of men and women in their 20s, 30s, and 40s seek out Carnival's "fun ships" for their nutty decor and around-the-clock excitement. The Pool Deck is always bustling (especially on the short 3- and 4-nighters), with music playing so loudly you have to go back to your cabin to think, and the discos

and nightspots hop until the early morning hours. See p. 101.

- **Royal Caribbean:** This line draws a good cross-section of men and women from all walks of life. As with Carnival, a decent number of passengers are singles in their 20s, 30s, and 40s, especially on the short 3- and 4-night weekend cruises. For an exciting Saturday-night-out-on-the-town barhopping kind of thing, the Voyager- and Freedom-class ships feature a unique multideck, boulevard-like indoor promenade lined with bars, restaurants, shops, and entertainment outlets. See p. 243.

8 Best Small-Ship Adventure Cruises

Among the small-ship lines, some afford great opportunities for real adventure, whether it's getting out into the wilderness, interacting with wind and wildlife, or just sailing to places you never imagined you'd go.

- **Lindblad Expeditions (Alaska and Baja):** Lindblad is the most adventure- and learning-oriented of the small-ship lines, with itineraries that stay far away from the big ports, concentrating instead on wilderness, wildlife, and history. Your time is spent learning about the outdoors from high-caliber expedition leaders and guest scientists, some of them aboard as part of Lindblad's alliance with the National Geographic Society. Try them in Alaska or in Mexico's Sea of Cortez for whale-watching and exploring starkly beautiful, uninhabited islands. See p. 335.
- **Cruise West (Alaska/Russia):** Want a real expedition? Cruise West's *Spirit of Oceanus* offers 2-week cruises that sail from mainland Alaska, through the Aleutian Islands, and then across the Bering Sea to Russia's severe Chukchi Peninsula, visiting coastal towns and wilderness areas. See p. 325.
- **The Maine Windjammers (Maine Coast):** You get a fairly relaxing adventure on these owner-operated vessels, but it's an adventure nonetheless, because these are real sailing ships, relying on the coastal winds for propulsion. If you like, you're welcome to learn the ropes of sailing while aboard, as you sail to small islands around Penobscot Bay. See p. 340.

9 Best Cruises for Fitness

Gone are the days when no one did anything more active at sea than play shuffleboard and perambulate the deck. In fact, we've heard of people who actually *lost* weight on their cruise by taking advantage of all the activity options. Here are some of the best.

- **Best Cruises for Onboard Sports:** Royal Caribbean wins hands down. Its five Voyager-class ships have huge gyms, full-size basketball courts, rock-climbing walls, miniature golf courses, in-line skating tracks, and ice-skating rinks. Their larger Freedom-class sisters go them one better by adding a surfing simulator, and the new *Oasis of the Seas* (which hadn't debuted yet at press time) will offer all that and more. See p. 247.
- **Best Onboard Gyms:** The best gyms at sea are aboard Royal Caribbean's Freedom-class ships: huge, 12,000-sq.-ft. spaces that include a Pilates studio and a full-size boxing ring, with boxing training available throughout the cruise. The ones on Royal's Voyager-class ships are pretty spiffy, too, as are those aboard Carnival's

Destiny-class ships; NCL's *Pearl, Gem, Jewel,* and *Jade;* and the majority of Holland America's ships, sans the old Statendam class. See p. 254, 258, 120, 208, and 202.

- **Best Golf Cruises:** While practically all the major cruise lines offer golf excursions and some level of golf instruction (usually at an outdoor driving net), several lines go the extra mile. Carnival, Holland America, Celebrity, Princess, and ultraluxe line Silversea all have programs created by Florida's Elite Golf Cruises, which provide comprehensive golf-cruise vacations, with onboard instruction, high-tech computer simulators, and golf excursions to major courses. See p. 105, 171, 132, 225, and 309.
- **Best Snorkeling and Scuba Cruises:** In the Caribbean, islands with particularly good waters for snorkeling and diving include Bonaire, Grand Cayman, Curaçao, and the U.S. Virgin Islands (at Buck Island Reef). In Central America, the waters off Belize (especially its famous Blue Hole) and Honduras's Roatan Island have great waters, and Hawaii is known as one of the best dive destinations in the world. See chapters 10 and 14 for more information on these destinations.

10 Best Ships for Spa-Goers

One company, Steiner Leisure, runs the vast majority of cruise ship spas, but facilities vary.

- **Cunard:** *QM2*'s two-story, 20,000-square-foot spa was designed and is operated by Canyon Ranch, one of the most famous spas in North America. Done up in a vaguely Art Deco and nautical motif, the place looks as good as it feels. More than 50 therapists dole out the latest treatments, and you can finish off your spa time with a dip in the ultrarelaxing aquatherapy pool. See p. 158.
- **Celebrity Cruises:** Celebrity's Solstice- and Millennium-class ships are at the top of the mainstream spa heap. Their roomy and attractive AquaSpas combine a huge repertoire of the latest wraps, packs, soaks, and massages with striking aesthetics inspired by Japanese gardens and bathhouses and Moorish and Turkish spas. Facilities include saunas, mud baths, massage rooms, Turkish baths, and thalassotherapy pools (a sort of giant New Age hot tub). See p. 127.
- **Royal Caribbean:** The two-level spa complexes aboard the line's Voyager- and Freedom-class ships are among the largest and best equipped out there. A peaceful waiting area has New Age tropical bird-song music piped in. Ahhhh, relaxation—until you get your bill. The Radiance-class ships have huge exotically themed solariums and 13 treatment rooms, including a special steam-room complex featuring heated, tiled chaise longues, and special showers simulating tropical rain and fog. See p. 247.
- **Regent Seven Seas:** Regent's spas are some of the few not run by the ubiquitous Steiner. Instead, the French spa company Carita imports its staff and hairdressers from Parisian salons, and offers company specialties such as the Rénovateur exfoliating process, as well as such cruise spa standards as hydrotherapy, reflexology, aromatherapy, body wraps, facials, manicures/pedicures, and anti-stress, therapeutic, and hot-rock massages. See p. 285.
- **Windstar Cruises:** The intimate, 308-passenger *Wind Surf* has extensive spa facilities for a ship its size, with prebookable spa packages combining six or more treatments tailored to both men and women. See p. 365.

11 Best Beaches

All warm-water cruises afford easy access to beaches, either close to the dock or, more likely, via a short taxi ride. These are some of the best in the various regions.

- **In the Eastern and Southern Caribbean:** So many . . . Palm Beach, Aruba; the Gold Coast beaches (Paynes Bay, Brandon's Beach, Paradise Beach, Brighton Beach), Barbados; Cane Garden Bay, Tortola, British Virgin Islands; Dickenson Bay, Antigua; Grand Anse Beach, Grenada; Diamond Beach, Martinique; Pinney's Beach, Nevis; St-Jean Beach and Grand Cul-de-Sac, St. Barts; Cupecoy Beach and Orient Beach, Sint Maarten/St. Martin; Pigeon Point Beach, Tobago; Trunk Bay, Saint John; and Paradise Beach, Nassau, The Bahamas. All are within a taxi ride of the cruise piers. See chapter 10.
- **In the Western Caribbean:** Grand Cayman's Seven-Mile Beach is a stretch of pristine sand easily accessible via a short taxi ride from Georgetown. Meanwhile, Jamaica's own Seven Mile Beach is in Negril, which is closer to Montego Bay than to Ocho Rios. See chapter 10.
- **On the Mexican Riviera:** For those in search of a back-to-basics beach, the best and most beautiful is Playa La Ropa, close to Zihuatanejo. Next door, the wide beach at Playa Las Gatas is dotted with restaurants and snorkeling sites. At Puerto Vallarta, spectacularly wide Banderas Bay has 26 miles of beaches, including popular Playa Los Muertos, full of *palapa* restaurants, beach volleyball, and parasailing. Acapulco is all about beaches, of which the best include Caleta, Caletilla, and the beach on Roqueta Island. Ditto for Cabo San Lucas, with its famous Lovers Beach at Land's End, where the Pacific meets the Sea of Cortez. See chapter 12.
- **In Hawaii:** Hawaii *is* beaches, hundreds of 'em. But because you'll be arriving by ship and have only limited time, you have to concentrate on ones that aren't too far off. Among the best that are accessible by taxi are Ala Moana Beach Park and Waikiki Beach on Oahu, the former a lot like L.A.'s casual Venice Beach, the latter a bit like Miami's vibrant South Beach. A bit farther afield, Lanikai Beach is just too gorgeous to be real. On the Big Island, Hapuna Beach regularly wins kudos as the state's most beautiful beach, and it's not too far from where you come ashore in Kailua-Kona. You'll have a longer taxi ride on Maui to visit Kapalua Beach, the island's prize stretch. On Kauai, try Poipu Beach, with stretches of sand as well as a grassy lawn graced by coconut trees. We once saw a Hawaiian monk seal here sunning itself on the sand, with police tape around it like a crime scene. See chapter 14.

Part 1

Planning, Booking & Preparing for Your Cruise

With advice on choosing and booking your ideal cruise and tips on getting ready for the cruise experience.

1 Choosing Your Ideal Cruise
2 Booking Your Cruise & Getting the Best Price
3 Things to Know Before You Go
4 The Cruise Experience

1

Choosing Your Ideal Cruise

The common wisdom says that all cruises are the same: big, flashy ships carrying old, overfed passengers to touristy ports, then setting them free to shop. Like all clichés, this one has a grain (or maybe a boulder) of truth, but it's hardly the whole story. For that reason, we prefer to call what we write about "travel by ship" rather than "cruising"—a more comprehensive description for a travel segment that gets increasingly diverse every year. Sure, you can still do the standard Caribbean cruise on a big white megaship, but consider this: From a variety of U.S. ports, you can also sail a small ship to visit the reefs and indigenous cultures of Central America; take a floating boutique hotel to little yachting islands; bop around Hawaii in the first new U.S.-flagged cruise ship in generations; take an expedition from Alaska to Siberia; take the *Queen Mary 2* across the pond to England; or sail a century-old schooner off the Maine coast. You can also choose a cruise geared to activities like kayaking and hiking, or interests such as fine food and wine, photography, culture or history, and other specialized themes. In this chapter, we'll introduce you to the lot of 'em.

1 Homeland Cruise Regions in Brief

Whether because of convenience or an aversion to flying (that is, the cost of flying or the fear of it), the idea of cruising from a port within driving distance holds a lot of appeal for a lot of folks. And anytime a lot of folks want to do something, you can be sure the cruise lines will be right there, ready to hand them an umbrella drink. Today, you can cruise to the Caribbean from close-in ports like Miami or more distant ones like New York, New Orleans, Houston, Norfolk, and others. You can visit Bermuda on ships that depart from Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. Alaska, western Mexico, and Hawaii are now accessible from half a dozen embarkation ports along the U.S. and Canadian West Coast. With all of these choices, there's a good chance you can drive right up to the gangway. In this section, we'll introduce all the regions (detailed in chapters 10 through 16) to which you can cruise from 19 U.S. and Canadian home ports. (We discuss each North American home port in chapter 9.)

THE CARIBBEAN/THE BAHAMAS/CENTRAL AMERICA

When most of us think of a cruise, we think of the islands. We imagine pulling up in our big white ship to a patch of sand and palm-tree paradise, a steel band serenading us as we stroll down the gangway in our shorts and flip-flops and step into the warm sun. The good news is that this image is a pretty accurate depiction of many islands in the Caribbean and The Bahamas (a group of islands that lie outside the Caribbean basin), as well as some coastal ports in Mexico and Central America. Sure, some are jampacked with cruise ship passengers, and many are pretty weak in the palm-tree

department; however, you're guaranteed nearly **constant sunshine** and plenty of beaches. On some you'll find lush rainforests, volcanic peaks, Mayan ruins, winding mountain roads, and beautiful tropical flowers. And all of them have **great beaches** and that laid-back, don't-hurry-me seaside pace.

Most Caribbean cruises are a week long, though you'll also find sailings as short as 5 nights and as long as 14 nights. Cruises to The Bahamas are usually 3 or 4 nights, though many Caribbean routes also include a stop in Nassau or one of the cruise lines' **private Bahamian islands.** On Caribbean cruises, itineraries usually stick to one region, either **eastern** (typically calling on some combination of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, St. Martin, and The Bahamas), **western** (usually Grand Cayman, Jamaica, Key West, Cozumel or one of the other Mexican ports, and sometimes ports in Belize or Honduras), or **southern** (less defined, but often departing from San Juan and including Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Barbados, St. Lucia, Antigua, and/or Grenada). Small-ship cruises frequently visit the less developed islands, mostly in the eastern and southern Caribbean, including the beautiful British Virgin Islands and ports such as St. Barts, Dominica, Nevis, and the tiny islands of the Grenadines. **Season:** Year-round, with the greatest number of ships cruising here between October and April.

THE PANAMA CANAL

Imagine the particularly 19th-century kind of hubris it took to say, "Let's dig a huge canal all the way across a country, linking two oceans." Imagine, too, the thousands of workers who pulled it off. That's on the minds of many people today as they sail through the Panama Canal, one of the greatest engineering achievements of all time. Many ships offer only two Panama Canal cruises annually, when repositioning between their summer season in Alaska and the fall/winter season in the Caribbean. However, many cruise lines also include **partial Canal crossings** as part of extended western Caribbean itineraries from Florida, sailing through the Canal's locks westbound to Gatun Lake, docking for a day of excursions that explore the Canal's history and Central America's rich culture, and then sailing back out in the evening. Others do **full crossings,** generally sailing between Miami or Fort Lauderdale and a port in California or the Mexican Riviera. The big draw of both full and partial crossings is the pure kick of sailing through the Canal, whose walls pinch today's megaships so tightly that there may be only a few feet of clearance on either side. The Canal's width and the length of its locks are so much on shipbuilders' minds that they coined the term *panamax* to describe the largest ships that are able to transit its length. Those measurements will soon be changing, though, because in September 2007 Panama began digging a new, 60% wider channel to parallel the existing canal along its narrowest sections, thus allowing transit by larger ships. The larger channel is scheduled to be completed sometime around 2014. **Season:** Roughly November through April.

ALASKA & BRITISH COLUMBIA

Alaska is America's frontier, a land of mountains, forests, and tundra just remote enough and harsh enough that it remains mythic, even if some of its "frontier" towns have been infiltrated by Starbucks. The main draws here are all things grand: huge glaciers flowing down from the mountains, enormous humpback whales leaping from the sea, eagles soaring overhead, and forests that seem to go on forever. Alaska Native culture figures in too, with the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian tribes all holding a considerable place in everyday life, from the arts to the business world. Most cruises concentrate on the **Southeast Alaska panhandle** (the ancestral home of those three

tribes), which stretches from Ketchikan in the south to Yakutat in the north, with British Columbia to the east and the vast reaches of interior Alaska and Canada's Yukon Territory to the north. Typical cruises sail either round-trip from Seattle or the nearby Canadian port of Vancouver, or north- or southbound between Vancouver and one of Anchorage's two main port towns, Seward and Whittier. Both options concentrate on ports and natural areas along the Southeast's **Inside Passage,** the intricate web of waterways that link the region's thousands of forested islands. Highlights of most itineraries include glaciers (those in famous Glacier Bay or several others), the old prospector town of Skagway, state capital Juneau, and boardwalked Ketchikan in the south. Cruises between Vancouver and Anchorage may also visit natural areas along the **Gulf of Alaska,** such as College Fjord and Hubbard Glacier. Small-ship cruises frequently visit much smaller towns and wilderness areas on the Inside Passage. Some avoid civilization almost entirely, and a few particularly expeditionary (and expensive) cruises sail far west and north, past the Aleutian Islands and across the Bering Sea to the Russian Far East. **Season:** Roughly mid-May through mid-September, although some smaller ships start up in late April.

THE MEXICAN RIVIERA & BAJA

The so-called Mexican Riviera is the West Coast's version of the Caribbean: a string of sunny ports within proximate sailing distance of San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. The first stop geographically is **Cabo San Lucas,** a party-oriented town at the southern tip of the Baja Peninsula, with the Pacific Ocean on one side and the Sea of Cortés on the other. Think beaches, beer, and bikinis, with thatched palapa bars providing some regional character. From there, cruises head southeast to such ports as **Puerto Vallarta, Mazatlán, Acapulco, Ixtapa,** and **Manzanillo,** a stretch famed for white-sand beaches, watersports, deep-sea fishing, and golf, with some history thrown in for good measure. Hernán Cortés blew through the region in the 1520s looking for treasure, and in the 1950s and 1960s, Hollywood did the same, mining the area both for locations and off-camera relaxation. Small-ship lines tend to stick to **Baja and the Sea of Cortés,** concentrating on the peninsula's small towns, natural areas, and remarkable whale-watching. These cruises typically sail from Cabo or the state capital, La Paz. **Season:** The heaviest traffic is October through April, though some ships sail year-round—especially short 3- and 4-night cruises that stop in Cabo or Ensenada, just south of the U.S./Mexico border. Small ships typically cruise Baja in the winter months only.

BERMUDA

Perhaps the one place in the world where you'll have a chance to see hundreds of British men's knees, Bermuda is a beautiful island chain known for its powdery pink-sand beaches (created by pulverized shells and coral over the eons), golf courses, and its sane and friendly manner. The locals really do wear brightly colored Bermuda shorts with jackets, ties, and knee-highs, but don't feel obligated to join them. The largest ships dock in the west end at the **Royal Naval Dockyard,** while some smaller vessels call at **Hamilton** (the capital city) and **St. George's** (Bermuda's quaint former capital). Ships pull alongside piers at all three places, and it only takes minutes to walk into town. There's plenty to do, too, from shopping in Hamilton for English wool and Irish linens to checking out the many historical sites, which range from the 300-year-old St. Peter's Church to the impressive nautical exhibits at the Dockyard's Maritime Museum. Most people, though, head for Bermuda's many dreamy beaches, which

are easily accessible by bus, taxi, or rented motor scooter. To keep things from getting too chaotic, Bermuda limits the number of ships allowed to call there, so there are generally just six ships operating 7-night cruises from New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and occasionally Norfolk. **Season:** Late April through early October.

HAWAII

If a place can simultaneously be the number-one honeymoon destination in America *and* one of the few places to which the Brady Bunch schlepped Alice and the kids, it must have something going for it, right? Think gorgeousness, with an almost embarrassing richness of stunning beaches, hula girls, and hunky Polynesian men, plus perfect weather almost all the time, so both locals and visitors stay in a friendly, mellow mood. Learn to surf, go to a luau, snooze on the sand, enjoy the local coffee, or check out the native Hawaiian culture, of which the locals are fiercely proud. The past survives alongside the modern world in a vibrant arts scene, from traditional Polynesian dance and music to painting, sculpture, and crafts. Each island is different, whether it has a fuming volcano or lush jungles and tropical flowers, though crashing surf and serene beaches are everywhere.

Though its presence has lessened over the past 2 years, **Norwegian Cruise Line** still dominates the Hawaii cruise market, with year-round inter-island service aboard *Pride of America.* Other lines typically visit the islands in April, May, September, and October, on their way between seasons in Alaska and the Caribbean. The four main port calls are to **Oahu,** with its famous Waikiki beach; **Maui,** home of historic Lahaina town; the **Big Island,** where the state's famous volcanoes reside (including Mauna Kea and the still-active Kilauea); and **Kauai,** the most natural and undeveloped of the four. **Season:** Year-round.

NEW ENGLAND & EASTERN CANADA

Lobster pots, whales, Victorian mansions, lighthouses on windswept bluffs—where else but New England, right? And what a place to visit by boat: In sailing-ship days, New England was the undisputed capital of U.S. shipbuilding, and the nearby Canadian provinces are known as the Maritimes. This is a seriously coastal place.

Both America and Canada were born in these parts, so you'll be in for lots of **historical sites** along the way, from Boston's Paul Revere House to Halifax, which received (and in many cases buried) victims of the *Titanic* disaster in 1912. Itineraries may include passing through **Nantucket Sound,** around **Cape Cod,** and into the **Bay of Fundy** or **Gulf of St. Lawrence.** Some ships traverse the St. Lawrence Seaway or the smaller Saguenay River. Big 2,000-passenger-plus ships cruise here, as well as much smaller vessels carrying 100 passengers or less. Most sail to or from New York, Boston, and Montréal. **Season:** The classic time to cruise here is in autumn (Sept–Oct), when a brilliant sea of **fall foliage** blankets the region. As the route becomes more and more popular, though, cruise lines are also scheduling 4- to 12-night trips in spring and summer.

U.S. RIVER CRUISES

So who needs the ocean? If your interests run toward history, nature, and U.S. regional culture, a river cruise is a fantastic option. River cruises generally operate seasonally, following Lewis and Clark down the Pacific Northwest's **Columbia and Snake rivers,** or following the fall foliage up the **Hudson River** and **Erie Canal.** At press time, those routes comprise the main river sailings offered in the U.S., following the demise of

Majestic America Line and RiverBarge Excursions and with them all regularly scheduled overnight sailings on the **Mississippi River.** Similarly, no lines are currently offering cruises in the **California wine country,** though we'd bet some will in the near future. **Season:** Columbia/Snake and Hudson/Erie Canal cruises usually run September to November.

2 Itineraries: The Long & the Short of It

Once you've decided where you want to go, you have to examine the available itineraries. Do you just want to get away for a few days or a few weeks? Do you want an itinerary that assigns a different stop to each day, or are you looking forward to just relaxing on the ship? And, if you're flying or driving a long way to the cruise's home port, do you want to spend a few days seeing that part of the country before or after your cruise? Options are what you have; choices are what you need to make.

LONG CRUISE OR SHORT?

The majority of cruises to the Caribbean, Alaska, Hawaii, and Mexico are **7 nights** long and depart on a Saturday or Sunday. Many of us like the weeklong vacation concept, but if you're looking to spend less money or you're a first-time cruiser who wants to test the waters, there are 2-, 3-, 4-, and 5-night cruises. Many of the **3- and 4-night cruises** sail from Florida to The Bahamas, or from California to Baja (Mexico). You can also find a lot of **4- and 5-night cruises** to the Caribbean and The Bahamas, as well as to New England/Canada in the summer and fall. Naturally, these depart on different days of the week, with some timed to sail over the weekend.

On the one hand, shorter cruises make sense if you're not sure you'll like the cruise experience. On the other hand, they also tend to be the rowdiest cruises, geared to people who want to pack as much partying into as short a time as possible. This is especially true of the 3-night weekend cruises offered by Carnival and Royal Caribbean. Also, be aware that cruise lines tend to put their oldest, most well-worn ships on short-cruise schedules, saving their new ships for their bread-and-butter weeklong itineraries.

Longer cruises, ranging from **9, 10, and 12 nights** to multiweek voyages, provide the chance to really get away and settle into the community aboard your ship. Longer cruises tend to be relaxed and steady, and are popular with older folks who have the time and money to travel. You'll find longer sailings in Alaska, the Caribbean, New England/Canada, and the Panama Canal, and also many long **repositioning cruises** when ships leave one cruise region and sail to another (for instance, heading from Alaska to the Caribbean in stages). These are often deeply discounted and sometimes visit unusual ports, but they also tend to spend more days at sea than they do in port—a plus or a minus, depending on your perspective.

DAYS AT SEA VS. DAYS IN PORT

When evaluating an itinerary, take a look at its day-by-day schedule. A few ships will visit a different port every day, but it's much more typical for them to spend 1 or 2 days at sea—either because they have to sail a long way between ports, or just to give passengers a chance to rest (and spend some money on board while they're at it). Many cruises these days—especially ones that sail from more northerly home ports to Caribbean destinations—are spending up to 3 days at sea on a 7-night itinerary and 4 days on an 8-night itinerary. That's not a bad thing if your main vacation goal is to

decompress, but if your goal is to see a lot of different ports, this is not an ideal situation. Ditto if you think you'll get that "are we there yet?" feeling between ports.

CRUISETOURS & ADD-ONS

Cruise lines offer various options for extending your vacation on land, either before or after your cruise. These range from simple 1- and 2-night add-on **hotel packages** to longer resort stays and full-blown land tours of a week or longer. The latter, known as **cruisetours,** are offered mostly in Alaska, where Holland America, Princess, Royal Caribbean, and Celebrity all have elaborate hotel and transportation infrastructure. Many parts of inland Alaska can be accessed this way, including Denali National Park, Fairbanks, Wrangell–St. Elias National Park, and the Kenai Peninsula. If you're so inclined, you can even go all the way to the oil fields of the North Slope of Prudhoe Bay, hundreds of miles north of the Arctic Circle. Many tours also head east into Canada, spending time in the starkly beautiful Yukon Territory or heading to Banff, Lake Louise, and Jasper National Park in the Canadian Rockies.

Caribbean-bound ships originating in Florida frequently offer extensions to **Orlando's theme parks.** Disney, naturally, is tops in this regard, offering seamless 1-week land/sea vacations, with 3 days in the park and 4 aboard *Disney Wonder,* or vice versa. Other regions have their own specialties: Small-ship cruises in Baja, for example, typically allow an extension to the amazing **Copper Canyon,** larger than the U.S. Grand Canyon.

3 Different Boats for Different Folks

Different cruise lines present different kinds of experiences, but physical factors such as the size and age of the ship also play a part when choosing your ideal cruise. What kind of ship floats your boat?

MEGASHIPS (1,800–3,600 PASSENGERS)

For the past dozen years, the so-called "megaships" have dominated the market, carrying upward of 1,800 passengers and offering an onboard experience any big-city dweller will recognize: food and drink available at any hour, entertainment districts filled with neon and twinkling lights, monumental architecture, big crowds, and a definite buzz. You often won't see the same faces twice from day to day, and, in fact, if you don't plan specific times and places to meet up with your spouse, squeeze, or friend(s), you may roam the decks for hours looking for them. (Luckily, most megaships are wired for cellphone service now, so you can call your travel companion if you can't find him or her.) The megas have as many as 15 passenger decks full of restaurants, bars, lounges, and shops, plus cabins of all shapes and sizes. Most have a grand atrium lobby, three or four swimming pools and hot tubs, theaters, a pizzeria, a specialty coffee shop, and one or more reservations-only restaurants. Mammoth gyms and spas boast dozens of exercise machines and treatment rooms, and vast children's areas include splash pools, playrooms, computer rooms, and video arcades. Activities go on all day long, including wine tastings, fashion shows, dance lessons, art auctions, aerobics classes, bingo, bridge, lectures, cooking demonstrations, pool games, computer classes, and trivia contests. And at night you have a choice of piano bars, discos, martini and champagne bars, sports bars, casinos, theaters, and big glitzy showrooms that put on big glitzy shows.

But even the megas aren't all alike. **Carnival**'s and **Costa**'s ships are the most theme-park-like, with their over-the-top decor and ambience. **NCL**'s are probably the most whimsical, with an overall design sense tuned to "fun," and a dollop of elegance in some rooms. **Royal Caribbean**'s megas blend a lot of flash with some elegant areas; **Princess** goes for a sort of Pottery Barn design sense and fun but not-too-daring activities and shows; **Holland America** and **Disney** blend tradition with some bright, modern spaces; and **Celebrity** is all about chic modernity.

As a general rule, these ships are so large that they're limited as to where they can go. Ships in the 100,000-ton range are currently too big to fit through the Panama Canal, and so operate from the same coast year-round—West Coast ships doing Mexico itineraries in winter and Alaska in summer, say; East Coast ships either staying in the Caribbean year-round or spending the summers sailing in Europe or New England/Canada. (Note that this may change in 2014, when the Canal's planned expansion is complete.) Some ports also lack docking facilities to accommodate these huge ships, meaning you either won't visit them at all or you'll have to be tendered ashore in shuttle boats.

SUPERMEGASHIPS (3,600–5,400 PASSENGERS)

As if megaships weren't big enough, in the past few years cruise lines have been introducing vessels so large that they need their own supersized category. The trend sort of began with the introduction of *Queen Mary 2* in 2004, though that enormous vessel—at 150,000 gross tons and 1,132 feet in length—actually carries "only" 2,592 passengers, double occupancy (about the same number Carnival crams into vessels only two-thirds her size). The real monsters first hit the seas in 2006, when Royal Caribbean introduced the 160,000-ton, 3,634-passenger ***Freedom of the Seas*** (and later, sister ships *Liberty* and *Independence*). In *Freedom*'s wake, Royal Caribbean upped itself with the over-the-top ***Oasis of the Seas,*** a 220,000-ton, 5,400-passenger leviathan that will debut in late 2009, after this book goes to press, and Norwegian Cruise Line began planning the 153,000-ton, 4,200-passenger ***Norwegian Epic,*** which debuts in May 2010. All these ships offer everything you find on a normal megaship and then some, with innovations only their enormo-size makes possible. See individual ship reviews in chapter 6 for details.

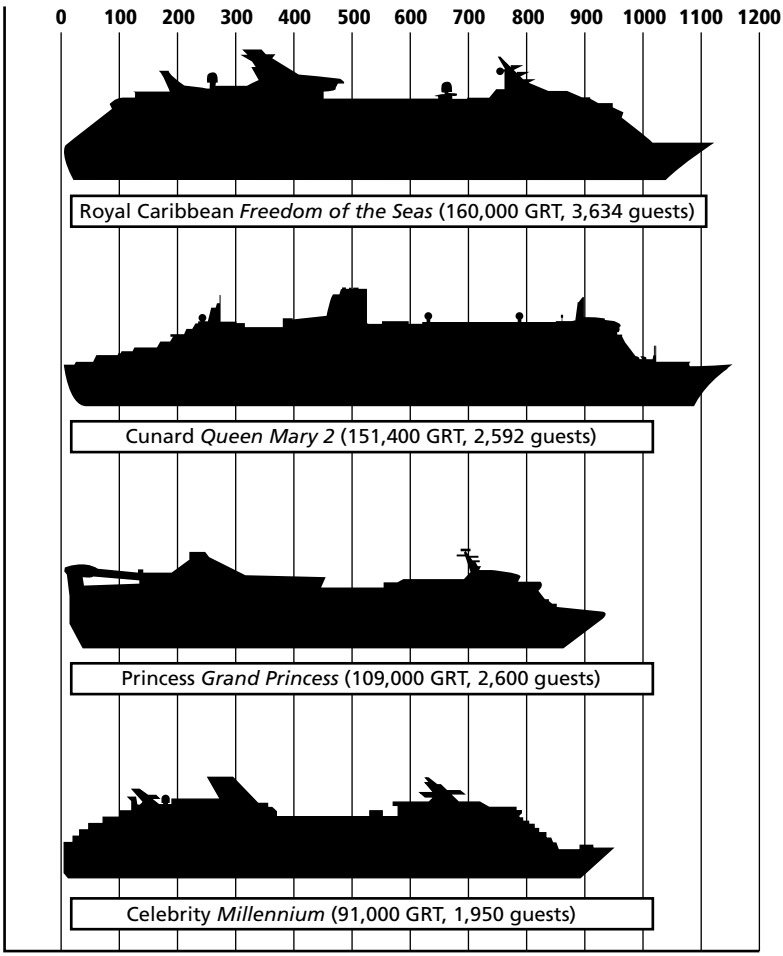
MIDSIZE SHIPS (600–1,800 PASSENGERS)

For a while it looked as if midsize vessels were going the way of the dodo, but the past few years have seen a small resurgence in their fortunes.

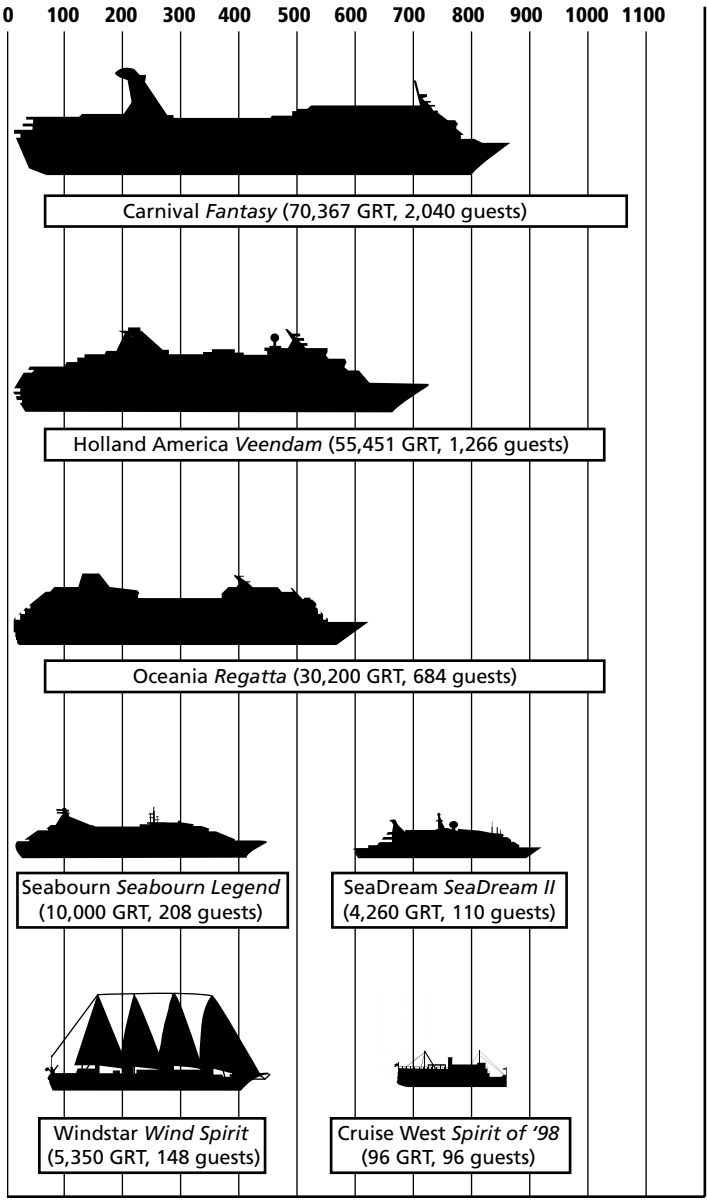
The term *midsize* is, of course, relative. Weighing in at between 20,000 and 60,000 gross tons, most of these ships are still larger than some of the great old ocean liners. (*Titanic,* for instance, was only 46,000 tons.) They're plenty big and spacious enough to provide a diverse cruise experience, though you won't find the range of activities and attractions you do on the megaships. Consider that a good thing: For some people, a more toned-down, lower-key cruise is just what the doctor ordered. **Oceania** and **Azamara** both operate three vessels carrying about 700 passengers apiece, with a country-club-type setting. Though somewhat larger, most of **Holland America**'s fleet and part of **MSC Cruises**'s fleet also fit the midsize description, aside from their newest classes of ships.

Among the true ultraluxury lines, midsize is about as big as it gets. **Crystal** and **Regent Seven Seas** both operate ships in the 50,000-ton range, carrying 700 to 940

SHIP SIZE COMPARISONS



Ships in this chart represent the range of sizes in the current cruise market. See reviews in chapters 6 through 8 for sizes of ships not shown here, then compare. Note that GRT = gross register tons, the standard measure of vessel size. Rather than representing weight, it indicates the amount of interior, revenue-producing space on a vessel. One GRT = 100 cubic feet of enclosed, revenue-generating space.


0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900 1000 1100
Carnival *Fantasy* (70,367 GRT, 2,040 guests)
Holland America *Veendam* (55,451 GRT, 1,266 guests)
Oceania *Regatta* (30,200 GRT, 684 guests)
Seabourn *Seabourn Legend* (10,000 GRT, 208 guests)
SeaDream *SeaDream II* (4,260 GRT, 110 guests)
Windstar *Wind Spirit* (5,350 GRT, 148 guests)
Cruise West *Spirit of '98* (96 GRT, 96 guests)

Homeboat Security

For better or worse, we're currently living in a security-obsessed world. People have to show ID to get into office buildings and take off their shoes to go through airport X-rays, so you'd better believe security measures are in place on cruise ships, too—some of them having been in place for years, others instituted relatively recently.

All the major cruise lines have their own **dedicated onboard security forces** who monitor people coming aboard (passengers, crew, delivery people, and contractors) and keep an eye out during the cruise, and we're not just talking about the kind of rent-a-cops you see at your local convenience store. Some lines have even hired Gurkhas, the famed Nepalese fighters, as onboard security personnel; hired former Navy SEALs as top-level security consultants; and held training for deck officers in how to react to takeover attempts. Other security measures are also in place, but the cruise lines prefer to keep them under their hats.

On a day-to-day basis, passengers will mostly notice ship security when boarding, both initially and at the ports of call. Most cruise lines photograph passengers digitally at embarkation, keying the photos to passengers' onboard IDs so that they can match face to picture every time they get back aboard thereafter. The system also allows the ship's staff to tell instantly who's aboard at any given time. Other security processes include **screening and X-raying of all hand-carried and checked bags,** the use of sniffer dogs in port, and maintenance of a security zone around cruise ships while they're in port. Ships must also submit a complete list of passengers and crew to the Coast Guard 96 hours before arriving at a U.S. port. Internationally, regulations issued by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in 2004 require all ports around the world to operate within a consistent framework to address security issues.

passengers—a telling figure when you consider that MSC's similarly sized ships pack in twice as many guests. Along with high-toned service, cuisine, and amenities, personal space is a major difference between the mainstream and luxe lines.

SMALL SHIPS (12–312 PASSENGERS)

If the thought of sailing with thousands of other people makes you want to jump overboard, a smaller ship may be more up your alley. Small ships are ideal for those who crave a calm, intimate experience where conversation is king. As in a small town, you'll quickly get to know your neighbors, because you'll see the same faces at meals and on deck throughout the week.

The small ships in this book can be broken down into four groups: sailing ships, coastal and river cruisers, expedition ships, and small luxury ships.

Sailing ships, obviously, have sails. But what's not necessarily obvious is how much—or how little—those sails are used to actually propel the ship. On Maine's coast, the independently owned schooners of the **Maine Windjammer Association** are honest-to-God sail-powered vessels, most without engines of any kind. If the wind

stops blowing, their only option is to let down their motorized yawl boat and push the ship until it catches a breeze. The ships of **Star Clippers, Sea Cloud,** and **Windstar,** on the other hand, usually operate under wind power for a part of each cruise, but they have engines to do most of the pushing. All these vessels tend to attract as many passengers in their 30s as in their 70s, all of them looking for something a little different from a regular cruise.

Most of the other small ships in this book are **coastal and river cruisers**—small vessels designed to sail in protected coastal waters and rivers. Very casual (and for the most part relatively plain), these ships provide cruises oriented heavily toward nature, wildlife-watching, culture, and history, with onboard naturalists to help interpret what you see. In addition to coastal cruisers, **Cruise West** and **Lindblad** also operate tougher **expedition ships** able to sail in the open ocean.

See "Active Travel & Adventure Cruises," later in this chapter, and chapter 8, "Small Ships, Sailing Ships & Adventure Cruises," for more details on all these options.

The **small luxury ships** of high-end lines such as **Seabourn, Silversea,** and **SeaDream** have a refined, ultra-elegant ambience. Cabins are spacious, service is gracious, gourmet meals are served on fine china, and guests dress the part. These ships have few activities besides watersports, putting more emphasis on quiet relaxation and visits to high-end ports such as St. Barts. **American Safari Cruises** operates truly tiny 12- and 22-passenger yachts. Service oriented like the luxe ships, they also have an adventure-travel vibe, with lots of built-in active excursions.

4 Cruises for Families

While cruises might not be adventurous or exotic, they sure are a convenient way for families to vacation. If you've got kids, you'll agree that preserving your sanity is a priority, and a cruise fits the bill. They're easy, safe, fun for the kids, and relaxing for Mom and Dad. Cruise lines have been going to great lengths to please parents and kids alike, as families become an ever larger and more influential segment of the cruising public. In fact, since 2000, Royal Caribbean, among the most family-friendly lines, has seen a more than 50% increase in the number of families cruising with kids under the age of 3. Same story with Carnival, which now carries 300% more children 17 and under than it did in 1995. During school holidays, there can be so many kids on board that playrooms get jampacked and you'll have to wait in line to sign in. Toddlers and teens are taken care of too: Royal Caribbean, for instance, has daily play groups for parents and toddlers (6 months–3 years), while elaborate teen facilities are all the rage across the industry.

The megaships cater most to families and attract the largest numbers of them, with playrooms, video arcades, and complimentary **supervised activities** usually provided for children ages 2 or 3 to 17 (generally, young children must be potty-trained to participate), and programs broken down into several age categories. Some lines set a **minimum age** for children to sail aboard (usually 6–12 months), but Disney provides a supervised nursery for ages 3 months and up, and Carnival accepts kids as young as 4 months in its group babysitting program. See the individual cruise line reviews for details.

Disney has the most family-friendly ships at sea today, followed by **Royal Caribbean,** whose ships (especially the Freedom-, Voyager-, and Radiance-class vessels) have huge play areas. The **Carnival** ships do a pretty good job, too (especially the Conquest class), as do the **Norwegian, Princess,** and **Celebrity** megaships. Even lines traditionally geared to older folks are getting in on the kid craze. Holland America has

Family Cruising Tips

Here are some suggestions for better sailing and smoother seas on your family cruise.

- **Reserve a crib.** If you'd like a crib brought into your cabin, request one when booking your cruise.
- **Bring baby food and diapers.** If your infant is still on jar food, you'll have to bring your own. You can store milk and snacks in your cabin's minifridge/minibar, which is standard on most new ships. (Ships more than 5 or 10 years old may provide them only in suites.) If yours is pre-stocked with beer and peanuts, you can ask your steward to clear it out.
- **Keep a tote with you on embarkation day.** After boarding a big ship, it may take a few hours before your luggage gets delivered to your cabin, so be sure to hand-carry a tote filled with whatever you'll need for the afternoon: diapers, baby food, a change of clothes, bathing suits, and so on.
- **Pack some basic first-aid supplies, and even a thermometer.** Cruise lines have limited supplies of these items, and charge for them, too. If an accident should happen on board, virtually every ship (except the smallest ones) has its own infirmary staffed by doctors or nurses. Keep in mind that first aid can usually be summoned more readily aboard ship than in port.
- **Warn younger children about the danger of falling overboard,** and make sure they know not to play on the railings.
- **Make sure your kids know their cabin number** and what deck it's on. The endless corridors and doors on the megaships often look exactly alike, though some are color-coded.
- **Prepare kids for TV letdown.** Though many ships today receive satellite TV programming, you won't get the range of options you have at home.

renovated all of its ships' kids' facilities over the past few years, and the kids' facilities and programs on **Cunard**'s ***QM2*** are phenomenal.

See the section "Best Cruises for Families with Kids," on p. 6, for more info.

BABYSITTING After the complimentary daylong roster of supervised activities wraps up between about 7 and 10pm, most mainstream lines provide slumber-party-style **group babysitting** in the playroom. Services are usually from about 10pm until 1 to 3am and are for ages 3 to 12, costing about $4 to $6 per hour per child. Some lines do accommodate younger kids, with toys, cribs, and nap areas geared to infants and toddlers: Disney's nurseries take children as young as 3 months, and Carnival includes kids as young as 4 months. The counselors will even change diapers. **Private in-cabin babysitting** by a crewmember is also provided by Celebrity, Royal Caribbean, and most high-end lines at a steeper $8 to $10 per hour (and sometimes a few bucks more for additional siblings). Using a private babysitter every night isn't cheap, but this book's co-author Heidi went this route when her boys were babies and swears by it—how else to dine and have cocktails in peace after a long, kid-centric day? Try to get them tucked in and asleep before the sitter arrives so that they won't have to deal with a new face just before bedtime.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY CABINS If your travel budget is tight, a family of four can share a cabin and get a good deal in return for all that togetherness: The rates for third and fourth persons sharing a cabin with two full-fare (or even heavily discounted) passengers are usually about half of the lowest regular rates. Norwegian Cruise Line allows children 1 and under to sail free with two full-fare passengers (though you must pay port charges and government taxes for the kids, which run about $100–$200 per person) and MSC Cruises often offers a "kids sail free" promotion for the under-17 set if occupying the same cabin as two parents or adults. Crystal has offered free passage for all children 11 and under for summer sailings in Alaska. ***Note:*** Because prices are based on double adult occupancy of cabins, single parents sailing with children usually have to pay adult prices for their kids, though deals for single parents are available every once in awhile.

As for how you'll all fit, think **bunk-style third and fourth berths** that fold out of the walls just above the regular beds. A few lines, such as Carnival and NCL, will even accommodate a fifth person on a rollaway bed on certain ships, if space permits, and a **baby crib** can be brought in if requested in advance. There are no two ways about it, though: A standard cabin with four people in it will be cramped, and with one bathroom . . . well, you can imagine. However, when you consider how little time you'll spend in the cabin, it's doable, and many families do take this option. The line that offers the best digs for families is definitely **Disney,** where the majority of cabins aboard *Magic* and *Wonder* boast two bathrooms (one with a bathtub), a minifridge, and a sitting area with a sofa bed. (While minifridges or minibars are fairly standard these days, tubs are a rarity unless you're splurging on a suite.) The cabins are almost as big as most ships' minisuites and comfortably sleep families of three or four—but, of course, Disney's rates are generally higher than those of their mainstream competitors. The ships' bona fide suites accommodate families of five to seven.

In general, whatever line you choose, families who can afford it should **consider booking a suite or junior suite.** Many have a pullout couch in the living room (or, better yet, two separate bedrooms) and can accommodate up to three or four children. If you have older kids, it may just be cheaper to book **connecting cabins**—two separate standard cabins with interconnecting doors. Almost every ship reviewed in this book has connecting cabins, with the exception of most small ships and a small handful of midsize vessels and megaships.

TAKING THE KIDS ON SMALL SHIPS For the most part, small-ship cruises are not kid-friendly, because usually there are no kids' facilities or other kids on board, and the pace is slow and the clientele older. Some possible exceptions include sailing ships like Star Clippers' *Royal Clipper,* some of the Maine Windjammer vessels, and Cruise West, which can be both fun and educational if your kids are older than about 12 and are well behaved.

5 Cruises for Honeymooners & Anniversary Couples

Practically all cruises have what it takes to make your honeymoon or anniversary memorable: moonlight and stars, the undulating sea all around, dimly lit restaurants, and the pure romance of travel. Of course, different ships are romantic to different kinds of people. The megaships present a big, flashy experience, like a trip to Vegas without the dry heat. The ultraluxury lines are more like a trip to Paris, with gourmet cuisine, fine wine, perfect service, and the finest bed linens. And some of the small-ship lines are like staying at a Vermont B&B (though others are more like a Motel 6

Getting Married on Board or in Port

If you'd like to have your marriage and honeymoon all in one, you can legally get hitched on many cruises, either aboard ship or at one of your ports of call.

Practically all the mainstream lines have wedding packages, with Carnival, Princess, and Royal Caribbean being the romance leaders, followed by NCL, Celebrity, Disney, Holland America, and Costa. In almost all cases, a local justice of the peace, notary, or minister must officiate; so even if you choose to hold your ceremony aboard ship, it will have to take place while the ship is in port, not at sea. Princess's Grand-, Diamond-, and Coral-class ships have **wedding chapels** on board, as do Royal Caribbean's Freedom-, Voyager-, and Oasis-class ships, Carnival's Spirit-class ships, and NCL's *Norwegian Sun, Star, Dawn, Jewel, Pearl, Gem, Jade,* and *Pride of America.* Other ships hold ceremonies in lounges that are decorated for the occasion.

If you want nonsailing family and friends to attend, you can hold the ceremony and reception at your port of embarkation, before the ship leaves. Guests will be on a special list with port security, and they'll have to bring the requisite ID to board. Ceremonies can also be arranged at various ports of call. On Caribbean routes, you can tie the knot in ports such as Aruba, Barbados, Grand Cayman, St. Thomas, Sint Maarten, San Juan (Puerto Rico), Ocho Rios and Montego Bay (Jamaica), Cozumel (Mexico), Nassau (The Bahamas), and Key West (Florida). Other options include Bermuda and the Alaskan ports of Ketchikan and Juneau (at the latter, you can get married atop Mendenhall Glacier, flying in by helicopter). If contemplating marriage in a port of call, remember that your cruise itinerary limits how far afield you can go, because ships generally stay in port only a limited number of hours.

Wedding packages generally start around $850 for intimate shipboard ceremonies for the bride and groom only. That price usually includes the services of an officiant (though you can bring your own if you prefer), a bouquet and boutonniere, champagne and keepsake glasses, a wedding cake, and the services of a photographer, but not the photos themselves—those will cost extra, should you choose to buy them. Adding a reception for

with a view). Beyond the ships themselves are the ports of call, providing experiences that are variously exotic, charming, exciting, and sybaritic.

HONEYMOON & ANNIVERSARY PACKAGES

Besides their inherent romantic qualities, cruises are a good practical honeymoon choice because many depart on Sundays, and couples who marry on Saturday can leave the next day. Some lines provide honeymooner freebies, such as a special cake in the dining room one night, or an invitation to a private cocktail party. Couples celebrating anniversaries are often invited as well. To get your share of freebies, be sure to tell your travel agent or the cruise line reservation agent that you'll be celebrating on

eight guests will bring the price up. The basic wedding/reception package offered by Carnival is $1,125. Prices go up from there based on the complexity and size of your reception (from a simple open bar and hors d'oeuvres to a formal meal in the ship's restaurant) and by port. Additional guests can be accommodated for an additional per-person charge. Ceremonies can also be performed off-ship in port, at higher prices.

THE LEGAL DETAILS No matter where you choose to wed, you must arrange for a marriage license from the U.S. or foreign port far in advance of your cruise. Policies vary from country to country, so you'll save a lot of headaches by having the cruise line's wedding department or consultant help you with the details. Be sure to check with these folks before booking your cruise to be sure wedding space is available on the date you have in mind.

HAVING THE CAPTAIN OFFICIATE Among all the lines in this book, only Princess, Celebrity, and Azamara allow you to get married by the captain. At **Princess,** the Grand-, Diamond-, and Coral-class ships all offer charming wedding chapels that seat about three dozen and are adorned with stained glass and fresh flower arrangements. Assistant pursers in dress-blue uniforms are available to escort a bride down the short aisle. Three different ceremony packages are offered, starting at $1,800 per couple (plus $450 for licensing fees). Depending on which you choose, they can include photography, video, music, and salon treatments for the bride. Onboard receptions can be custom-tailored with various options—hors d'oeuvres, champagne, wedding cake, and so on. Friends and relatives who aren't sailing can even monitor the wedding courtesy of the ships' chapel Web cams, which broadcast an updated photo every minute or so. (Look at the very bottom of the Princess website home page for "Bridge Cams." Pick a ship from the "Wedding Cams" drop-down menu.) At **Celebrity** and **Azamara,** weddings are performed in one of the ship's public rooms. A variety of packages are available that mix and match everything from cake and champagne to private receptions in the ship's specialty restaurant. Basic captain-performed wedding packages at both lines begin around $2,500.

the cruise. Beyond the freebies, the mainstream cruise lines aren't shy about selling a variety of **honeymoon/anniversary packages.** You'll get a pamphlet describing the available packages when you receive your cruise tickets in the mail. NCL's $79 Honeymoon Package is about average for its price range, and includes champagne and strawberries at embarkation, a dinner for two with complimentary wine at the ship's specialty restaurant, an invitation to a cocktail party, a keepsake photo, and canapés in your cabin one evening. The $229 Deluxe Package adds breakfast in bed one day and two 25-minute massages at the spa. All the mainstream lines have similar deals, with packages in the $300 to $500 range generally piling on more spa treatments,

champagne, shore excursions, canapés, chocolate-covered strawberries, and the like. These packages must be ordered before the cruise.

Ultraluxe lines such as Silversea, Seabourn, Regent Seven Seas, SeaDream, and Crystal are less involved in these kinds of promotions, but that's because, for them, free champagne and canapés, whirlpool bathtubs, and five-course dinners served in your cabin are all a matter of course.

VOW-RENEWAL & "ROMANCE" PACKAGES

Some lines have vow-renewal packages for couples who'd like to celebrate their marriage all over again, or packages that simply add romance to a vacation. On Holland America, for example, couples can renew their vows at a special group ceremony at sea, catered with drinks and cold hors d'oeuvres; the $149 package includes a floral arrangement in your cabin, a photo and photo album, a certificate presented by the captain, and dinner for two at the Pinnacle alternative restaurant. Visitors can attend the ceremony, but they have to pay: $13 per adult, $6.25 for kids 2 to 12. Princess has souped-up vow-renewal packages for $205 and $485 per couple. The former includes the ceremony, an orchid bouquet and boutonniere, a bottle of champagne and souvenir champagne glasses, a framed formal portrait of the ceremony, and a commemorative certificate signed by the captain; the latter adds a champagne breakfast in bed, two terry-cloth robes, a visit to the spa for half-hour massages or facials, canapés or petits fours in your stateroom every evening, and a personalized invitation from the captain to visit the bridge while in port. These packages are fairly representative of what's provided by the other mainstream lines.

6 Cruises for Gay Men & Lesbians

A number of specialized travel agencies have cruises for gay men and/or lesbians, either chartering a full ship outright or reserving blocks of cabins with cruise lines that are known to be particularly gay-friendly. Full charters typically bring aboard their own entertainers (as well as the ship's usual entertainment staff) and program many of their own activities. Hosted group trips typically have cocktail parties for group members and specially programmed activities on board and in port.

- **Atlantis Events Inc.,** 9200 Sunset Blvd., Ste. 500, West Hollywood, CA 90069 (✆ **800/628-5268** or 310/859-8800; www.atlantisevents.com), provides all-gay charters with lines such as Celebrity, Azamara, Holland America, and Royal Caribbean. In addition to the lines' own entertainment, Atlantis brings aboard its own featured performers. Past guests have included Patti LuPone, Cybill Shepherd, and Chaka Khan.
- **Friends of Dorothy Travel,** 1177 California St., Ste. B, San Francisco, CA 94108-2231 (✆ **800/640-4918** or 415/864-1600; www.fodtravel.com), offers many full-gay charters with lines such as Celebrity, NCL, and the ultraluxe SeaDream yachts, as well as hosted tours on *Queen Mary 2* and other ships.
- **Olivia Cruises and Resorts,** 434 Brannan St., San Francisco, CA 94107 (✆ **800/631-6277** or 415/962-5700; www.olivia.com), provides full-ship charters targeted specifically to the lesbian community, mostly aboard Holland America's ships. Guest performers in recent years have included k.d. lang, Margaret Cho, Heart, the Indigo Girls, Wynonna Judd, Shawn Colvin, and Melissa Etheridge.

- **Pied Piper Travel,** 330 W. 42nd St., Ste. 1804, New York, NY 10036 (✆ **800/874-7312** or 212/239-2412; www.piedpipertravel.com), offers hosted gay cruises with various onboard parties and activities and arranged visits with the gay community at various ports of call.
- **R Family Vacations,** 1500 Broadway, Ste. 1710, New York, NY 10036 (✆ **866/732-6822;** www.rfamilyvacations.com), was founded by Rosie O'Donnell's partner, Kelli O'Donnell, along with gay travel veteran Gregg Kaminsky. Trips to (so far) the Caribbean and Alaska are targeted to the gay and lesbian family market.
- **RSVP Vacations,** 2535 25th Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55406 (✆ **800/328-7787** or 612/729-1113; www.rsvpvacations.com), provides full-ship charters on lines such as NCL and Holland America. All sailings are targeted to both gay men and lesbians, and bring aboard their own guest performers. RSVP works through more than 10,000 different travel agencies; locate one by calling the 800 number or checking the website above.

7 Active Travel & Adventure Cruises

It's true: Cruises *can* be active and adventurous, whether you want to really get off-the-beaten track on an expeditionary small ship or just keep your heart rate elevated several hours a day on a megaship.

ADVENTURE & EXPEDITIONARY CRUISES

A few years ago, we met this great Australian couple in Alaska. They'd wanted to see the state for years, to really get into its forests and see its wildlife, but they didn't have time for a 3-week wilderness trek. Their solution? They booked a small-ship cruise that split its sailing week between exploring wilderness areas and visiting tiny fishing towns. It was a perfect choice.

These types of trips (offered by Lindblad Expeditions and Cruise West in Alaska, Baja, the Pacific Northwest, and Central America, and by American Safari Cruises in Alaska and Baja) include few of the usual activity options, but that's by design: Their focus is on what's outside the vessel, not inside, and some are more active than others. Lindblad, for instance, builds activities such as hiking, kayaking, and exploring by inflatable launch into its adventure itineraries. On Star Clippers' sailing ships, those inflatable launches might be used to take passengers water-skiing or on banana-boat rides. See "Different Boats for Different Folks," earlier in this chapter, for more about the different kinds of small-ship experiences.

KEEPING ACTIVE ON THE MAINSTREAM & LUXE SHIPS

Ships started becoming more active in the 1990s, and today a new megaship doesn't launch without a huge gym, jogging track, and sports decks that may have basketball courts, golf nets, and marquee activities like rock-climbing walls, bungee trampolines, or surfing simulators (the latter three associated with Royal Caribbean). A handful of smaller and mostly high-end ships concentrate on watersports, with retractable or floating watersports platforms to allow easy swimming, water-skiing, and windsurfing right from the ship. See "Keeping Fit: Gyms, Spas & Sports," in chapter 4, for an overview, and the "Pool, Fitness, Spa & Sports Facilities" heading of each ship review section in Part 2 for a rundown on which ship has what.

ACTIVE SHORE EXCURSIONS

On shore, the cruise lines are providing more and more active excursions. No need to sit on a bus for 3 hours if you'd rather be feeling the burn. Along with snorkeling and diving, options such as biking, hiking, kayaking, horseback riding, zipline canopy tours, and river rafting are enjoyed in many ports in the Caribbean, Alaska, Mexico, and Central America. For more details, see the port reviews in Part 3.

8 Cruises for the Young & Old

"So which are the ships for young people?" We get this question all the time, and the answer is, there aren't any. That is, there aren't any that attract *only* young people, just like there aren't many hotels or resorts that do. Most ships appeal to a mixed bag of ages, with couples in their 40s, 50s, and 60-plus making up the majority, along with a growing percentage of younger couples, often with kids. Destination plays into the balance, with the Caribbean and Mexican Riviera attracting a sizable young crowd as well as lots of retirees. Alaska, Europe, New England/Canada, and Asia itineraries, on the other hand, draw mostly an older, 50-plus crowd, though you will see families with young kids in Alaska and Europe during the summer. All that said, here are some general guidelines about ships and the ages of the people you'll find on them.

The **youngest crowds,** in the 20s-to-40s range, are typically found on 2-, 3-, and 4-night warm-weather cruises (and next on the 7-night cruises) offered by mainstream lines such as Carnival, Royal Caribbean, and NCL. Young-at-heart types, who may be 54 or 72, but wear bikinis and short-shorts and drink piña coladas for lunch, will also be attracted to those lines. Young families make up the majority of passengers on Disney Cruise Line.

The **oldest folks,** upward of 60, will be the vast majority on luxury lines such as Seabourn, Silversea, and Regent. Cunard and Holland America have also traditionally attracted a mature crowd, though both are trying hard to broaden their demographic. Among the small-ship lines, you'll find a generally older crowd aboard American Canadian Caribbean, American Cruise Lines, and Cruise West.

9 Ships for Nonsmokers & Smokers

Once upon a time, all the cool kids smoked—Sinatra, JFK, even Joe DiMaggio. It was an era when life was seen through a swirling bluish haze, and, at least in the movies, nobody ever coughed. Today? Not so much. Around the world, cities, states, and even whole countries are banning smoking in many public places, even bars. It's enough to make a smoker want to run away to sea . . . except that doesn't really work anymore either.

As goes public opinion, so go the cruise lines, which generally prohibit smoking now in all restaurants, theaters, corridors, elevators, and many other public areas, too. Policies vary by line, with most allowing smoking in designated smoking sections of bars and lounges and on most open decks. Lines vary as to whether they allow smoking in cabins. Among those that do, none has specifically designated smoking and nonsmoking cabins—you just get what you get, though the cruise lines do scrub their cabins well between cruises, if necessary by shampooing the rug and using air purifiers. In our hundreds of cruises, we've never found a cabin that reeked from last week's Marlboro Man.

Norovirus: Montezuma's Revenge at Sea

Unless you've been living under a rock, you've seen, heard, or read news reports over the past few years detailing outbreaks of norovirus (aka Norwalk-like virus) aboard cruise ships. But what is it exactly, and how worried should you be?

Answer: It's a stomach bug that causes nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. And really, there's not much to worry about. Norovirus is an extremely common bug that hits some 23 million Americans a year, mostly on land—and the reason you don't hear about those cases is they don't happen in a proscribed (and newsworthy) environment like a cruise ship. A hundred people might pick up a bug at the local mall, but what's the chance they'd all remember they caught it at the food court?

What makes Norovirus such a pain for cruise ships is that it's incredibly contagious: According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), people infected with the virus can pass it on from the moment they begin feeling ill to between 3 days and 2 weeks after they recover—meaning that cruise ship outbreaks are almost certainly the result of contagious passengers bringing the infection aboard, rather than of unsanitary practices on the ships themselves. Face it, cruise ships are a lot like kindergarten: When one kid shows up sick, everybody gets sick.

In any case, don't worry too much. It's no fun to have your vacation spoiled by rampant puking, but norovirus causes no long-term health effects for most people. Persons unable to replace liquids quickly enough—generally the very young, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems—may become dehydrated and require special medical attention, but that's about the worst of it. More good news: Outbreaks have been on the downswing since they were first reported. Cruise lines are keeping a close eye on boarding passengers for signs of illness, and have further stepped up their already vigilant sanitation routines to reduce the chance of transmission. A small outbreak on one of our cruises in 2006 was contained immediately after the first sick passengers were identified, and it did not spread any further among passengers and crew.

The **best lines for nonsmokers** are Azamara Cruises, Oceania Cruises, and small-ship line American Cruise Lines. Both Azamara and Oceania allow smoking only in two small areas: one indoors, in a small section of one top-deck lounge, and the other outdoors, in a corner of the Pool Deck. Azamara also follows a no-smoking policy on all land components of its cruisetours. American Cruise Lines is the most stringent of all, operating entirely smoke-free vessels. Many of the Maine Windjammer schooners are also smoke-free, though some allow smoking in a small section of the outside deck.

Lines that prohibit smoking in staterooms, private balconies, and most public areas include Celebrity, MSC, and Regent Seven Seas. On Disney and Royal Caribbean, smoking on sea-facing private balconies is allowed.

Lines that allow smoking only on designated outside decks include American Canadian Caribbean, American Safari, Cruise West, Lindblad, Sea Cloud, SeaDream Yacht Club, Star Clippers, and Windstar.

For a detailed, **line-by-line summary of smoking regulations** on these and all other lines in this book, click over to www.frommers.com/articles/5872.html.

10 Cruises for People with Disabilities & Health Issues

Though most of the cruise industry's ships are foreign-flagged and are not required to comply with the **Americans with Disabilities Act,** ships built over the past 15 years are almost universally accessible, and some older ships have been retrofitted to offer access. Most ships that can accommodate wheelchair-bound passengers require that they be accompanied by a fully mobile companion. The ship reviews in chapters 6 through 8 include information about access and facilities in the "Cabins" sections, but be sure to discuss your needs fully with your travel agent prior to booking.

See the "Onboard Medical Care" box below for information on medical facilities aboard ship.

ACCESSIBLE CABINS & PUBLIC ROOMS Most ships have a handful of cabins specifically designed for travelers with disabilities, with extrawide doorways, large bathrooms with grab bars and roll-in showers, closets with pull-down racks, and furniture built to a lower height. The "Ships at a Glance" chart beginning on p. 80 identifies ships with accessible cabins, and the "Cabins" section in each of the ship reviews in chapters 6 through 8 indicates how many. The vast majority of the ships reviewed in the **mainstream** and **luxury** categories (chapters 6 and 7) have accessible cabins, but of the **adventure ships** in chapter 8, only the American Cruise Lines ships and Cruise West's *Spirit of '98* and *Spirit of Oceanus* are either fully or partially wheelchair-friendly. Most public rooms on newer vessels have ramps, and some also have lifts to help passengers with disabilities into the pools.

ELEVATORS Most shipboard elevators (particularly aboard today's megaships) are wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs, but make sure before booking. Due to the size of the megaships (where it can sometimes be a long way from place to place), cabins designed for wheelchair users are intentionally located near elevators. If you don't use a wheelchair but have trouble walking, you'll also want to choose a cabin close to an elevator to avoid a long hike. The vast majority of small vessels and sailing ships do not have elevators.

TENDERING INTO PORT If your ship is too large to dock or if a port's docks are already reserved by other vessels, your ship may anchor offshore and shuttle passengers to land via small boats known as **tenders.** Some tenders are large and stable and others are not, but the choppiness of the water can be a factor when boarding either way. If you use a wheelchair or have trouble walking, it may be difficult or impossible to get aboard. For liability reasons, many lines forbid wheelchairs to be carried onto tenders, meaning you may have to forgo a trip ashore and stay on board when in these ports. An exception to this is Holland America, which has a wheelchair-to-tender transport system aboard all of its ships except *Prinsendam.* The system works by locking a wheelchair on a lift, which transports it safely between the gangway and the tender.

Onboard Medical Care

The vast majority of ships have a nurse and sometimes a doctor aboard to provide medical services for a fee. Most of their cases involve seasickness, sunburn, and the like, but they may also be required to stabilize a patient with a more serious ailment until he or she can be brought to a hospital at the next port of call or, in extreme cases, be evacuated by helicopter. If they're very unlucky, the medical staff may also have to deal with an outbreak of **norovirus,** the flulike gastrointestinal bug that strikes a ship every once in awhile (see "Norovirus: Montezuma's Revenge at Sea," earlier).

All large ships have **staffed infirmaries,** but if you have special needs, check with the line to find out exactly what medical services are provided. The quality of ships' staffs and facilities can definitely vary. Generally, big ships have the best-equipped facilities and largest staff because they deal with such a huge number of passengers and crew. A few years ago, the author of an extensive *New York Times* article concluded that **Holland America** and **Princess** had the best onboard medical facilities, as well as the most generous pay packages for their doctors. Princess's Grand- and Coral-class ships, for instance, carry at least one and sometimes two doctors, as well as two to five nurses, and are linked via a live video and camera system with U.S.-based medical centers. All Holland America ships can consult 24 hours a day (via phone or e-mail) with the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, and its Vista-class ships have a teleradiology system that allows X-rays to be transmitted to a shore-side medical facility. (Princess's *Sea Princess* and Carnival's Spirit- and Conquest-class ships also have this system.) HAL's *Amsterdam* has the capability to do live television telemedicine conferencing and transmit X-rays to shore-side medical facilities. Note that shipboard doctors are not necessarily certified in the United States, and aren't always experts in important areas such as cardiology.

Small ships (those discussed in chapter 8) generally don't carry onboard medical staff because they sail close to shore and can evacuate sick passengers quickly. Usually, some crewmembers have nursing or first-aid experience. Small ships always carry doctors when sailing more far-flung international itineraries.

Check with your travel agent to find out if itineraries you're interested in allow your ship to dock at a pier. Note that weather conditions and heavy traffic may occasionally affect the way your ship reaches a port.

TRAVEL-AGENT SPECIALISTS A handful of experienced travel agencies specialize in booking cruises and tours for travelers with disabilities. **Accessible Journeys,** 35 W. Sellers Ave., Ridley Park, PA 19078 (✆ **800/846-4537** or 610/521-0339; www.disabilitytravel.com), organizes both group and individual cruises on accessible ships, with accessible airport transfers and shore excursions, as well as an escort on group tours. **Flying Wheels Travel,** 143 W. Bridge St., Owatonna, MN 55060 (✆ **877/451-5006** or 507/451-5005; www.flyingwheelstravel.com), is another option.

2

Booking Your Cruise & Getting the Best Price

Like everything else in the world, cruise prices fluctuate based on supply-and-demand. Given the economic mess the U.S. found itself in by early 2009, cruise fares were at an all-time low, and enticements such as onboard credits, free shore excursions, and cabin upgrades were being offered left and right. It doesn't take a brain surgeon to figure out that now's a pretty darn good time to cruise. Read on to learn how to find the best cruises at the best fares. In this chapter, we've laid out the top booking strategies for 2010, along with other money-saving suggestions and booking tips.

1 Bargains and Deals Galore: Cruise Pricing 101

It's simple. When the lines have more ships than they can fill, prices are low. They're higher when people are clamoring to cruise. Given the sorry state of the global economy, fewer people are traveling and that means savings for those who do. At press time, few ships were sailing full, so even booking just 2 weeks before departure was no problem. Cruise lines are desperate to fill cabins and are offering crazy prices like $399 per person for a 16-night transatlantic crossing. You do the math. Depending on when you cruise and which ship and cabin you choose, expect to pay as little as $300 to $400 per person for a week in the Caribbean and Alaska these days, with the average for a standard cabin somewhere in the $600 range. Expect prices to be higher during holiday periods (such as spring break and Christmas), but overall, if you can spare the dough, now's the time to go. "Consumers are definitely in the driver's seat these days," says Mike Driscoll, editor of industry bible *Cruise Week.*

As for the actual booking process, cruise lines still tend to do what they've been doing for years, relying on traditional **travel agents** and **websites** to sell their product, rather than retaining huge in-house reservations departments.

Generally, travel agents have less leeway in discounting than previously, as the cruise lines have taken more control of their pricing. This means you're less likely than in the past to find rates dramatically different from one travel agent to another.

For tips on using both online and brick-and-mortar agencies to the best advantage, see "Agents & the Web: Finding the Best Deals," later in this chapter.

2 The Prices in This Guide

Just like the airbrushed models dancing and lounging throughout cruise lines' brochures, the prices printed in many of them aren't real, varying from just a little more than people really pay to wildly inflated. But the trend is for lines to finally realize the pointlessness of the pricing farce. Remember that **you'll always pay less,** except aboard some of the specialized small-ship lines.

Many cruise guides and magazines print these brochure rates despite knowing how useless they are in the real world, but not us. Working with Nashville-based **Just Cruisin' Plus** (✆ **800/888-0922;** www.justcruisinplus.com), we've determined the **actual prices** people are paying for cruises aboard all the ships in this book. The difference can be startling. For example, the brochure rate for a 7-night eastern Caribbean cruise aboard Holland America's new *Eurodam* is $1,649 for a low-end outside cabin. In reality, however, during our sampling period (2010 cruises, priced in Apr 2009), customers were able to get that same cabin for just $649—a full $1,000 difference! The pricing disparity for Carnival's new *Carnival Splendor* was even greater, with the brochure rate for an outside cabin standing at $1,989 and the actual going rate sitting way down at $499. A few lines have recognized the ludicrousness of this situation and simply stopped printing brochure rates—and we have too. In our ship-review chapters, we've opted to only print the sample actual pricing that we received from Just Cruisin' Plus, broken down to the approximate per-day cost for the lowest-priced **inside cabins** (ones without windows), lowest-priced **outside cabins** (with windows), and lowest-prices **suites** aboard each ship. Remember that cruise ships generally have many different categories of cabins within the basic divisions of inside, outside, and suite, all priced differently. The rates we've listed represent the *lowest priced* (which usually equates to smallest) in each division. If you're interested in booking a roomier, fancier cabin or suite, the price will be higher, with rates for high-end inside cabins being close to those for low-end outsides, and rates for high-end outsides being close to those for low-end suites.

Remember that rates are always subject to the basic principles of supply-and-demand, so those listed here are meant as a guide only and are in no way etched in stone—the price you pay may be higher or lower, depending on when you book, when you choose to travel, whether any special discounts are being offered by the cruise lines, and a slew of other factors. All rates are cruise only, per person, based on double occupancy, and, unless otherwise noted, include **port charges** (the per-passenger fee each island charges the cruise line for entry). Government fees and taxes are additional.

3 The Cost: What's Included & What's Not

Overall, a cruise is superconvenient and adds up to a pretty good deal when you consider that your main vacation ingredients—accommodations; meals and most snacks; stops at ports of call; a packed schedule of activities; use of gyms, pools, and other facilities; and shows, cabaret, jazz performances, and more—are covered in the cruise price. Just don't think it's *all* free. To beef up their bottom lines as much as possible, cruise lines are pushing a slew of **added-cost onboard extras.** You can always just say no, but if you're like most of us, you'll have an "oh, what the heck" attitude once you step across that gangway. So, when figuring out your budget, be sure to figure in the additional costs you'll incur for shore excursions (which can run from $25 up to $500, with many in the neighborhood of $75 a pop), bar drinks and specialty coffees, pricey spa treatments ($25–$500, plus tip, though $110–$145 is about average for a 50-min. massage), souvenirs, and even fresh flowers and fancy cakes if your self-restraint is really low. **Gratuities** are also typically charged to guests' accounts at the end of the cruise; the cruise lines pay their service staff minimal salaries on the assumption that they'll make most of their pay in tips. Generally, you can expect to tip about $70 per person during a weeklong cruise. (For more about tipping, see chapter 3, "Things to Know Before You Go.") If you're the gambling type, you're a prime candidate for

increasing your ship's revenue stream, whether your game is craps, bingo, scratch-off cards, or Caribbean stud poker.

Some of the most luxurious and expensive lines—Silversea, Seabourn, Regent Seven Seas, and SeaDream Yacht Club—come closest to being truly all inclusive by including all alcoholic beverages and gratuities in their cruise rates. Aside from these aberrations, though, you can expect to shell out at least another $250 to $500 per person for an average 7-night cruise. You can easily double that if, for instance, you have a bottle of wine with dinner every night, a couple of cocktails after, go on three $100 shore excursions, hit the ship's $30-per-person alternative restaurants a few times, try your luck at bingo, and buy some trinkets in the onboard shops or at ports of call. Of course, just as at a hotel, you'll also pay extra for items such as ship-to-shore phone calls and e-mails, massages, manicures, facials, haircuts, fancy coffees, and medical treatments in the ship's infirmary. If you're not cruising from a port you can drive to, then you'll have to figure in **airfare to the ship,** which is rarely included in cruise prices.

4 Money-Saving Strategies

From early-booking discounts and last-minute deals to sharing cabins and senior and frequent-cruiser discounts, there are a lot of ways to save money on your cruise.

As they have for years, cruise lines continue to offer **early-booking discounts,** though as long as the economy is in the tank, many of these discounts are being offered up until departure, so there's much less incentive to book early. Price aside, when booking early you naturally are more assured of getting exactly what you want in terms of cruise line, ship, and everything else.

If you're in the habit of traveling at the last minute, you can snag good deals for Caribbean cruises this way, even more so during **slow periods** such as September, October, and nonholiday weeks in November and December. The main thing you may sacrifice when booking late is a measure of choice: You'll have to take the ship, itinerary, and cabin category that's available, whether it's the one you wanted or not. Getting airfare at the last minute may be tough, too. Plus, most last-minute deals are completely nonrefundable; if you book a week before the cruise, for example, the full fare is due upfront and you get zip back if you change your mind a few days later.

You'll find **last-minute deals** advertised online (for instance, on Frommers.com), but the best route is checking with travel agents who specialize in cruises, and getting on their e-mail blast lists that alert you to special promotions and discounts. See "Agents & the Web: Finding the Best Deals," later in this chapter.

From time to time, some cruise lines offer discounts to **seniors** (usually defined as anyone 55 years or older), so don't keep your age a secret, and always ask your travel agent about these discounts when you're booking. For discounts in general, the best organization to join is **AARP,** 601 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20049 (✆ **888/687-2277;** www.aarp.org), the biggest outfit in the United States for people age 50 and over.

If you've cruised with a particular cruise line before, you're considered a valued **repeat passenger,** and are usually rewarded with 5% to 10% discounts (sometimes higher) on future cruises. Depending on how many times you've sailed, you may also get cabin upgrades, invitations to private cocktail parties, priority check-in at the terminal, casino vouchers, logo souvenirs, a special newsletter, and a bottle of wine or a

fruit basket in your cabin on embarkation days. The catch to all of this is that repeat-passenger discounts often cannot be combined with other pricing deals, particularly in the case of the mainstream lines.

If you're a serious repeater, though, the generous booty you get on the small upscale ships can add up to something substantial. After you sail a total of 140 days with Seabourn, for instance, you're entitled to a free 7-day cruise and a 14-night voyage after sailing 250 days, while Silversea passengers get a free 7-night cruise after sailing 350 days and a free 14-night cruise after 500 days.

Some cruise lines offer reduced **group rates** to folks booking at least eight or more cabins, but this is really based on supply-and-demand. If a ship is selling well, group deals may not be available, but if it isn't, the cruise line has a lot more incentive to wheel and deal. Groups may be family reunions and the like, but travel agents may also create their own "groups" whose members don't even know they're part of one. Quick explanation: The travel agent reserves a block of cabins on a given ship and the cruise line in turn assigns it a discounted group rate that agents can pass on to their clients. The cruise line benefits because they're potentially selling a lot of cabins through agency X, and the agency benefits because it can offer its clients a good price. So, always ask your travel agent if you can be piggybacked onto some group space.

Very small groups—three or four people max in most cases—can share one cabin if it's equipped with **third or fourth berths** (sofa beds or bunk-style berths that pull down from the ceiling or wall). This route isn't recommended for anyone who suffers from claustrophobia. Disney, Carnival, and NCL go one better by offering standard cabins geared to families, which can accommodate five people—Disney's even have 1½ bathrooms. The rates for third, fourth, and fifth passengers in a cabin, whether adults or children, are typically 30% to 60% or more off the normal adult fare—and these days sometimes they're free. You can also look into **sharing a suite.** Many can accommodate five to seven people, and some are outlandishly roomy.

If cruising solo, you'll be charged something called the **single supplement,** which adds 50% to 100% to the standard per-person cruise fare—a consequence of cruise lines basing their revenue expectations on two people sharing every cabin. Some lines quietly forego or reduce this kind of supplemental charge if a ship isn't filling up as a particular departure date approaches, but there's no way to predict it. HAL offers a **cabin-share service** that will try to match you with a same-gender roommate. If the cruise line can't find a roommate, if you're lucky you may get the cabin at the regular double occupancy rate anyway. Very few ships offer cabins specifically designed for solo passengers anymore.

5 Agents & the Web: Finding the Best Deals

Today, practically everybody has a website, and the difference between so-called **Web-based cruise sellers** and more **traditional travel agencies** is that the former rely on their sites for actual bookings, while the latter use theirs as glorified advertising space to promote their offerings, doing all actual business in person or over the phone. With a few exceptions, the cruise lines also have **direct-booking engines** on their own sites, but we don't recommend using them. Why? Because agents and Web-based sellers may have negotiated group rates with the lines, be part of a consortium with whom a line is doing an upgrade promotion, or have other deals going that enable them to offer you lower rates. Though it may sound peculiar, the cruise lines actually prefer

Average Cost of Onboard Extras

Just so you're not shocked when your shipboard account is settled at the end of your trip, here are some average prices for onboard extras.

Laundry	$1–$7 per item
Self-service laundry	$1–$3 per load
Pressing	$1–$4 per item
5×7-inch photo from ship photographer	$7–$10
Scotch and soda at an onboard bar	$3.95–$6
Bottle of beer (domestic/imported)	$3.50/$6
Bottle of wine to accompany dinner	$20–$300
Glass of wine	$6–$18
Bottle of Evian water (.5 liter/1.5 liters)	$1.50/$3.99
Can of Coca-Cola	$1.50–$2
Ship-to-shore phone call or fax	$4–$15 per minute
Cellphone calls at sea	Approx. $2–$3 per minute
Sending e-mails	50¢–$1 per minute
50-minute massage	$110–$145
Sunscreen, 6-ounce bottle	$12
Disposable camera	$15–$25

that you book through third parties because having agents and websites do the grunt work allows the lines to maintain small reservations staffs and, simultaneously, maintain goodwill in a system that works—something they have to consider because the vast majority of cruises are booked through agencies of one type or another. Typically, mainstream cruise lines report that about 70% of their bookings come from traditional travel agencies (for the luxury lines, about 98% use travel agents). "The more you pay, the more likely you are to need or want a travel agent," says Mike Driscoll.

WHICH OFFERS BETTER PRICES?

As far as cruise prices go, there's no absolutely quantifiable difference between the real-live travel agents (whether your hometown brick-and-mortar mom-and-pop agency or a big anonymous mega-agency) and Internet-based cruise sellers. For some years now, the major lines have been offering all agencies, large or small, the same basic rates, give or take. What may separate one agency from another are the extras that may be thrown in, from free bottles of wine to onboard spending credits.

WHICH PROVIDES BETTER SERVICE?

Because pricing is closer to being equitable across all types of cruise agencies than ever before, it's really service that distinguishes one agency from another. Most websites give you only a menu of ships and itineraries to select from, plus a basic search capability that takes into account only destination, price, length of trip, and date, without

consideration of the type of cruise experience each line offers. That's fine if you know exactly what you want, and are comfortable on the computer. If, on the other hand, you have limited experience with cruising and with booking on the Web, it may be better to see a traditional agent, who can help you wade through the choices and answer your questions. For instance, a good agent can tell you which cabins have their views obstructed by lifeboats; which are near loud areas such as discos and the engine room; which ships and itineraries you should avoid if you're not looking for a party vibe; and, in general, what the major differences are between cabin categories. A lot of this kind of detailed information won't be found on the Web—you need to hear it from a person. To be better prepared before you call an agent, it's a good idea to do some research on the Web first.

Keep in mind, though, that you need to find an agent who really knows the business—and this applies to every type of agent: those who work out of their home or an agency office, those who work for large conglomerates and deal mostly over the phone, and those who staff toll-free numbers associated with Web-based sellers. Some are little more than order takers: They may not know much more than pricing, and may never even have been on a cruise themselves. This system works okay for selling air travel, where the big question is coach or first class, case closed; however, a lot more variables are associated with booking a cruise. An experienced cruise agent—someone who has sailed on or inspected a variety of ships and booked many customers aboard in the past—will be able to tell you about special promotions (such as cabin upgrades), act as an intermediary should any problems arise with your booking, order special extras such as a bottle of champagne in your cabin when you arrive, and in general make your planning easy.

So how do you know if an agent is any good? The best way, of course, is to use one who has been referred to you by a reliable friend or acquaintance. This is particularly valuable these days, when agents are being pressed to squeeze more profit from every sale, making them less likely to take the time to discuss options. When you're searching for a good agent, it doesn't hurt if an agent is an **Accredited Cruise Counselor (ACC), Master Cruise Counselor (MCC),** or **Elite Cruise Counselor (ECC),** designations doled out by the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), an industry trade organization, after agents take classes and inspect a number of ships. Many of the cruise lines' websites list **preferred agencies** (generally broken down or searchable by city or state), as does the CLIA site (**www.cruising.org**). Many of the most reliable agencies are also members of **agent groups,** such as Virtuoso, Signature Travel Network, and Vacation.com. In the sections below, we list some of the best agencies and the major cruise-selling websites.

6 Agencies & Websites

Of the approximately 17,000 U.S. travel agencies (including home-based), 15% sell 90% of all cruise travel in North America; about 10% to 15% of those are considered cruise only. Agencies come in all shapes and sizes, from small neighborhood stores to huge chain operations. Like banking, telecommunications, and media, the travel industry has been rife with consolidation over the past decade, so even that mom-and-pop travel agency on Main Street may turn out to be an affiliate of a larger agency. When it comes to home-based agents, they may or may not be affiliated with a national group such as CruiseOne or SeaMaster Cruises. It's better if they are, so they

Be Savvy & Beware of Scams

With the number of offers seen by a potential cruise buyer, it can be difficult to know if an agency is or isn't reliable, legitimate, or, for that matter, stable. It pays to be on your guard against fly-by-night operators and agents who may lead you astray.

- **Get a referral.** A recommendation from a trusted friend or colleague (or from this guidebook) is one of the best ways to hook up with a reputable agent.
- **Use the cruise lines' agent lists.** Many cruise line websites include agency locator lists, naming agencies around the country with which they do business. These are by no means comprehensive lists of all good or bad agencies, but an agent's presence on these lists is usually another good sign of experience.
- **Beware of snap recommendations.** If an agent suggests a cruise line without asking you a single question first about your tastes, beware. Because agents work on commissions from the lines, some may try to shanghai you into cruising with a company that pays them the highest rates, even though that line may not be right for you.
- **Always use a credit card to pay for your cruise.** It gives you more protection in the event the agency or cruise line fails. When your credit card statement arrives, make sure the payment was made to the cruise line, not the travel agency. If you find that payment was actually made to the agency, it's a big red flag that something's wrong. If you insist on paying by check, you'll be making it out to the agency, so it may be wise to ask if the agency has default protection. Many do. (***Note:*** The only exception to this is when an agency is running a charter cruise—for example, a music cruise with special entertainment.)
- **Always follow the cruise line's payment schedule.** Never agree to a different schedule the travel agency comes up with. The lines' terms are always clearly printed in their brochures and usually require an initial deposit, with the balance due no later than 75 to 45 days before departure. If you're booking 2 months or less before departure, full payment is usually required at the time of booking.
- **Keep on top of your booking.** If you ever fail to receive a document or ticket on the date it's been promised, inquire about it immediately. If you're told that your cruise reservation was canceled because of overbooking and that you must pay extra for a confirmed and rescheduled sailing, demand a full refund and/or contact your credit card company to stop payment.

have access to more resources and competitive rates. Use a home-based agent only if he or she has been doing this for a long time.

Even though you'll get similarly low rates from both traditional and Web-based agencies these days, we can't stress enough that service counts for something, too. There's value

in using a travel agent you've worked with in the past or one who comes highly recommended by someone you trust. A good agent will be there for you if problems arise.

TRADITIONAL AGENCIES SPECIALIZING IN MAINSTREAM CRUISES

To give you an idea of where to begin, here's a sampling (by no means comprehensive) of both cruise-only and full-service agencies that at press time had enjoyed solid reputations selling cruises with mainstream lines such as Princess, Carnival, Royal Caribbean, Celebrity, Holland America, and Norwegian. A few are affiliated with the big chains; most are not. While all have websites to promote current deals, the agencies listed primarily operate from a combination of walk-in business and toll-free telephone-based business.

- **Cruise Holidays,** 7000 NW Prairie View Rd., Kansas City, MO 64151 (✆ **800/869-6806** or 816/741-7417; www.cruiseholidayskc.com)
- **Cruises Only,** 10 Harbor Park Dr., Port Washington, NY 11050 (✆ **800/278-4737;** www.cruisesonly.com), part of World Travel Holdings, the largest cruise retailer in the world
- **Just Cruisin' Plus,** 5640 Nolensville Rd., Nashville, TN 37211 (✆ **800/888-0922** or 615/833-0922; www.justcruisinplus.com)

Another way to find a reputable travel agency in your town is by contacting one of a handful of **agency groups** or **consortiums,** which screen their members. The two following groups, whose members specialize in mainstream cruises, both maintain websites that allow you to search for local agencies with your postal code or city: **Travel-Savers** (✆ **800/366-9895;** www.travelsavers.com) is a group of more than 1,000 agencies, and **Vacation.com** (✆ **800/843-0733;** www.vacation.com) is the largest group in the U.S., with some 6,000 members.

TRADITIONAL AGENCIES SPECIALIZING IN LUXURY CRUISES

This is a sampling of reputable agencies, both cruise only and full service, that specialize in selling ultraluxury cruises such as Cunard, Seabourn, Silversea, Crystal, Regent Seven Seas, and SeaDream Yacht Club.

- **All-Travel,** 2001 S. Barrington Ave., Ste. 315, Los Angeles, CA 90025 (✆ **800/300-4567** or 310/312-3368; www.all-travel.com)
- **Cruise Professionals,** 130 Dundas St. E., Ste. 103, Mississauga, ON L5A 3V8, Canada (✆ **800/265-3838** or 905/275-3030; www.cruiseprofessionals.com)
- **Landmark Travel,** 12 S.E. 8th St., Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316 (✆ **800/547-0727** or 954/523-0727; www.landmark-travel.com)

If you're looking for a top-of-the-line cruise, definitely use an agency that's a member of one of the following agency groups whose members specialize in luxury cruises. Agency members can pass on lots of great extras to clients, from cabin upgrades to private cocktail parties. Members are extremely knowledgeable and it's not unusual for someone from the agency to sail on board the cruise to assist clients. **Virtuoso** (✆ **866/401-7974;** www.virtuoso.com) is a consortium of more than 300 member agencies nationwide, including some on the list above. To find an agency in your area, call the toll-free number, or e-mail **travel@virtuoso.com**. Another group is **Signature Travel Network** (✆ **800/339-0868;** www.signaturetravelnetwork.com), with about 200 member agencies across the country. Call to find an agency in your area, or e-mail **info@signaturetravelnetwork.com**.

7 Choosing Your Cabin

When it comes right down to it, choosing a cabin is really a question of money. From a windowless lower-deck cabin with upper and lower bunks to a 1,400-square-foot suite with a butler and mile-long private veranda, cruise ships can present a dozen or more stateroom categories that differ by size, location in the ship, amenities, and, of course, price. To see what we mean, go to the Cruises Only website (**www.cruisesonly.com**); it presents 360-degree tours and photos of most ships in "About Your Ship" pages throughout the site.

Traditionally, the rule of thumb is that the higher up your cabin sits in a ship and the more daylight it has, the more you pay; the lower you go into the bowels of the ship, the cheaper the fare. On some of the more modern ships, however, that old rule doesn't always ring true. On ships launched recently by Carnival, for instance, designers have scattered their most desirable suites on midlevel decks as well as top decks, thereby diminishing the prestige of an upper-deck cabin. For the most part, though, and especially on small ships, where cabins are virtually identical, cabins on higher decks are still more expensive, and outside cabins (with windows or balconies) are more expensive than inside cabins (those without). Outside cabins whose windows are obstructed by lifeboats will be cheaper than ones with good views.

EVALUATING CABIN SIZE

Inch for inch, cruise ship cabins are smaller than hotel rooms. Of course, having a private balcony attached to your cabin, as many do, makes your living space that much bigger.

A roomy **standard cabin** is about 170 to 190 square feet, although some of the smallest are about 85 to 100 square feet. Disney has some of the more spacious standard cabins at sea, at 226 square feet. Celebrity's standards are spacious enough at around 170 to 175 square feet, with those on its Millennium-class ships sometimes as big as 190 square feet. Carnival's and Holland America's are about 185 square feet or more. By way of comparison, equivalent standard cabins on a good number of ships in the Norwegian and Royal Caribbean lines are quite a bit smaller—try 120 to 160 square feet—and can be cramped. Cabins on the small-ship lines such as ACCL can be very snug—on the order of 70 to 100 square feet.

All the standard cabins on the high-end lines are roomy—in fact, many of the high-end ships are "suite only." For example, on Silversea's *Silver Shadow* and *Silver Whisper,* cabins are 287 square feet, plus a 58-square-foot balcony. Across the board, from mainstream to luxe, **suites and penthouses** are obviously the most spacious, measuring from about 250 square feet to more than 1,400 square feet, plus private verandas.

Most cruise lines publish schematic drawings in their brochures, with square footage and, in some cases, measurements of length and width, which should give you some idea of what to expect. (We also include square footage ranges for inside cabins, outside cabins, and suites in the cruise ship descriptions in chapters 6 to 8.) Consider measuring off the dimensions on your bedroom floor and imagine your temporary oceangoing home, being sure to block out part of that space for the bathroom and closet. As a rough guideline, within a cabin of around 100 square feet, about a third of the floor space is gobbled up by those functional necessities.

Now, while you may be thinking, "Gee, that's really not a lot of space," remember that, like a bedroom in a large house, your cabin will likely be a place you use only for sleeping, showering, and changing clothes.

THE SCOOP ON INSIDE CABINS VS. OUTSIDE CABINS

Whether you really plan to spend time in your cabin is a question that should be taken into account when deciding whether to book an inside cabin or an outside cabin (that is, one without windows or one with windows or a balcony). If you plan to get up bright and early, hit the buffet breakfast, and not stop till the cows come home, you can probably get away with booking an inside cabin and save yourself a bundle. Inside cabins are generally neither as bad nor as claustrophobic as they sound. Many, in fact—such as those aboard most of the Carnival and Celebrity fleets—are the same size as the outside cabins, and most cruise lines design and decorate them to provide an illusion of light and space.

If, on the other hand, you want to lounge around and take it easy in your cabin, maybe ordering breakfast from room service and eating while the sun streams in—or, better yet, eating out *in* the sun, on your private veranda—then an outside cabin is definitely a worthwhile investment. They're also vital for smokers (though some lines prohibit smoking on cabin balconies). Remember, though, that if it's a view of the sea you want, be sure when booking that your window or balcony doesn't just give you a good view of a lifeboat or some other obstruction (and remember, there are likely to be balconies on the deck right above your balcony, so they're more like porches than actual verandas). Some cruise line brochures tell you which cabins are obstructed, and a good travel agent or a cruise line's reservation agent can tell you which cabins on a particular ship might have this problem.

OTHER CABIN MATTERS TO CONSIDER

Unless you're booking at the last minute (a few weeks or less before sailing), as part of a group, or in a cabin-share or cabin-guarantee program (which means you agree to a price, and find out your exact cabin at the last minute), you can work with your agent to choose a particular cabin. If possible, try to have some idea of what cabin category you'd like, or at least have a list of must-haves or must-avoids. Need a **bathtub** rather than just a shower? That narrows your choices on most ships. Want **connecting cabins** so you and your kids, friends, or relatives can share space? Most ships have 'em, but they sometimes book up early, as do cabins with **third or fourth berths** (usually pull-down bunks or a sofa bed). Almost all ships have cabin TVs these days, but a few don't. Want an **elevator** close by to make it easy to get between decks? Is the view out the cabin's windows obstructed by lifeboats or other ship equipment? Most important, **keep cabin position in mind if you suffer from seasickness.** A midships location on a middle deck is best because it's a kind of fulcrum point, the area least affected by the vessel's rocking and rolling in rough seas.

8 Booking Your Air Travel

Except during special promotions, airfare is rarely included in cruise rates for Caribbean, Alaska, Mexico, and New England/Canada cruises, though it often is for Europe and Asia itineraries. So if you can't drive to your port of embarkation and need to fly to get to Miami, New York, San Juan, New Orleans, or one of the other 20-plus home ports, you'll have to either purchase airfare on your own through an agent or online, or buy it as a package with your cruise. The latter is often referred to as an **air add-on** or **air/sea package.** You can usually find information on these programs in the back of cruise line brochures and on their websites, along with prices on flights

from more than 100 U.S. and Canadian cities to the port of embarkation. Here are the pros and cons to booking your airfare through the cruise line.

- **Pros:** When you book through the cruise line, they'll know your airline schedule and, in the event of delayed flights and other unavoidable snafus, will do what they can to make sure you get to the ship.
- **Cons:** Odds are it'll be more expensive to book through the cruise line than on your own. Also, if you book through the lines, you probably won't be able to use any frequent-flier miles you've accumulated, and the air add-on could require a circuitous routing—with indirect legs and layovers—before you finally arrive at your port of embarkation. Sources tell us only about 10% of passengers book airfare through the cruise lines.

If you choose to arrange your own air transportation, make absolutely sure that airfare is not included as part of your cruise contract. It rarely is with the exception of Europe and Asia cruises, but if it is, you're often granted a deduction (usually around $250 per person) off the cruise fare. If you purchase your own airfare, you can buy **bus transfers from the airport to the ship** through the cruise line (if you buy the cruise line airfare, transfers are often included in the price), but it's often cheaper to take a taxi, as is the case in Miami and Fort Lauderdale.

9 Prebooking Your Dinner Table & Arranging Special Diets

In addition to choosing your cabin when booking your cruise, on most ships you can also choose an **early or late seating** for dinner in the main restaurant (the buffet restaurants on most ships are always open seating), and sometimes even put in a request for a particular size table (tables for 2, 4, 8, 10, and so on). Assignments for breakfast and lunch are rarely required, as dining rooms operate with open seating during these meals. At night, though, early seatings allow you to get first dibs on shipboard nightlife (or, conversely, promptly hit the sack), while late seatings allow you to linger a bit longer over your meal. In the past few years, more lines—especially Norwegian and, to a slightly lesser extent, Royal Caribbean and Princess—have junked this traditional early-late paradigm (in at least some of their restaurants) in favor of **open-seating dining** in which you simply show up when hunger pangs strike. For a more detailed discussion, see section 6, "Onboard Dining Options," in chapter 4.

If you follow a **special diet**—whether vegetarian, low salt, low fat, heart healthy, kosher, halal, or any other, or if you have certain food allergies—make this known to your travel agent when you book, or at least 30 or more days before the cruise, and make sure your diet can be accommodated at all three meals (sometimes special meal plans will cover only breakfast and dinner). The vast majority of ships provide vegetarian meals and health-conscious choices on their daily menus nowadays (Crystal even offers kosher food daily), but it can't hurt to arrange things ahead of time. A cruise is not the place to go on an involuntary starvation diet.

10 Booking Pre- & Post-Cruise Hotel Stays

Cruise lines often provide hotel stays in the cities of embarkation and debarkation, and most of them are tourist attractions in their own right. You may want to spend some time in New York, Oahu, or Vancouver before sailing, or drive to Disney World from Port Canaveral. The cruise lines' package deals usually include hotel stays and

transportation from the hotel to the ship (before the cruise) or from the docks to the hotel (after the cruise). Inquire with your travel agent, and compare what the line is offering with what you may be able to arrange independently. Nowadays, you might get a hotel stay much cheaper on your own.

11 Cancellations & Insurance

Hey, stuff happens. Given today's unpredictable geopolitical situation, economic crisis, and extreme weather conditions, you just never know what might occur. A cruise could be canceled, for example, because of shipyard delays (if you've booked an inaugural cruise), the outbreak of an infectious disease, mechanical breakdowns (such as nonfunctioning air-conditioning or an engine fire), the cruise line going out of business, an act of war, or a major flood. Some people feel more comfortable buying cancellation protection and insurance just in case.

"It depends on the individual. For example, insurance makes much more sense if you're a senior citizen or are responsible for someone with health problems," says *Cruise Week* editor Mike Driscoll.

That said, in today's competitive market, cruise lines have been making extraordinary efforts to appease disappointed passengers, whether they bought insurance or not. Typically, a line will reschedule the canceled cruise and give passengers big discounts on future cruises—after all, they don't want bad press from cheating hundreds or thousands of people. There are, however, no set rules on how a line will compensate you, over and above a refund, in the event of a cancellation.

Now, if the shoe is on the other foot and you need to cancel your own cruise, you'll generally get a refund—most lines give you every cent back if you cancel at least 2 to 3 months before your departure date, although details vary from line to line. If you cancel closer to departure, you'll usually get a partial refund up until about 15 to 30 days before the cruise.

"You buy insurance if you're concerned about medical issues or work commitments possibly preventing you from taking a cruise at the last minute," adds Driscoll. For all of these reasons—worries about travel, worries about cruise lines canceling or going belly up, sudden illness or other emergencies, missed flights that cause you to miss the ship, or even if you just change your mind—you may want to think about purchasing **travel insurance.**

If you're *just* worried about missing the ship, go a day early and spend your money on a hotel and nice dinner instead. If you're worried about medical problems occurring during your trip, on the other hand, travel insurance may be more vital. Except for the small coastal cruisers described in chapter 8, most cruise ships have an infirmary staffed by a doctor and a nurse or two; but in the event of a dire illness, the ship's medical staff can only do so much. Therefore, you may want a policy that covers **emergency medical evacuation** and, if your regular insurance doesn't cover it, the potential cost of major medical treatment while away from home.

There are policies sold through the cruise lines (with details varying from line to line) and others sold independently, and both have pros and cons.

CRUISE LINE POLICIES VS. THIRD-PARTY INSURERS

A good travel agent can tell you about policies sold through the cruise lines and ones sold independently of the lines. No matter which you choose, it's absolutely crucial to read the fine print because terms vary from policy to policy.

Both kinds typically reimburse you in some way when your trip is affected by unexpected events (such as flights canceled due to bad weather, plane crashes, dockworkers' strikes, or the illness or death of a loved one, as late as the day before or day of departure), but not by "acts of God," such as hurricanes and earthquakes (the exception being if your home is made uninhabitable, putting you in no mood to continue with your cruise plans). Both also typically cover **cancellation of the cruise** for medical reasons (yours or a family member's); **medical emergencies** during the cruise, including evacuation from the ship; lost or damaged luggage; and a cruise missed due to weather-related airline delays (though some only cover delays over 3 hr.). Neither kind of policy will reimburse you if your travel agent didn't send in your payment and goes bankrupt, so using a travel agent you're very familiar with or one who's recommended is the safest precaution you can take. (And, of course, *always use a credit card,* never a check. If a corrupt travel agent cashes it, or a decent one just goes out of business, then you could get screwed.) Most cancellation policies also do not cover cancellations due to work requirements.

THIRD-PARTY COVERAGE Even though agents get a commission for selling both cruise line policies and independent policies, most agents and industry insiders believe that non-cruise line policies are the best bet. That's because some, such as Access America (see below), will issue insurance to those with **preexisting medical conditions** if the condition is stable when you purchase the insurance (a doctor would have to verify this if you ever made a claim) and if you purchase the policy within some specified time, usually within 14 days of your initial deposit on the cruise. They also offer **supplier-default coverage** that kicks in if a cruise line goes bankrupt, as a handful did between 2000 and 2003.

Still, you shouldn't be afraid to book a cruise. A well-connected travel agent should see the writing on the wall months before a cruise line fails—commissions will slow or stop being paid, phone calls won't be returned, and industry trade publications will report on any problems. The less customer-service-driven cruise sellers may not stop pushing a troubled cruise line, however, and may continue selling it up to the very last minute.

According to the Fair Credit Billing Act, if you paid by credit card (and again, you should *always* pay with a credit card), you'll generally get your money back if you dispute the charge within 60 days of the date the charge first appears. If you paid in full 4 months before the cruise, you'll likely be out of luck going the credit-reimbursement route and may have to resort to litigation. Also, while many lines post a multimillion-dollar bond with the Federal Maritime Commission, creating a fund from which they can reimburse creditors should they fail financially, it's no guarantee you'll get all or any of your money back. Technically, the bond covers cruise payments for all passengers embarking from U.S. ports, but because the line would have banks or other vendors to pay off first, you'd likely get only pennies on the dollar, if that. Still, it's better that a cruise line have a bond than not—and if you learn that a line is having trouble making bond payments, it may be a sign of serious financial woes.

Policies are available from reputable insurers such as **Access America,** P.O. Box 71533, Richmond, VA 23286 (✆ **800/284-8300;** www.accessamerica.com), and **Travel Guard International,** 1145 Clark St., Stevens Point, WI 54481 (✆ **800/826-4919;** www.travelguard.com), whose websites maintain lists of the lines they cover (or no longer cover); these are helpful in figuring out which lines may be financially shaky. **Travel Insured International,** 52-S Oakland Ave., P.O. Box 280568,

East Hartford, CT 06128 (✆ **800/243-3174;** www.travelinsured.com), offers policies ranging from "Cancel for Work Reasons" to "Cancel for Any Reason" (up to 48 hr. before departure, and receive up to 75% of the nonrefundable trip cost).

CRUISE LINE COVERAGE Cruise lines have their own policies, many of them administered by New York–based **BerkelyCare** (✆ **800/797-4514;** www.berkely.com). If you opt for this type of policy out of sheer convenience (the cost is added right onto your cruise fare), keep in mind they do not cover you in the event of a cruise line bankruptcy (though using a credit card can save you here; see above) or for cancellation of your cruise due to a preexisting medical condition, usually defined as an unstable condition existing within 60 days of your buying the insurance. Some lines' policies are cancellation *waivers* rather than insurance policies and will issue a cruise credit for the penalty amount if a medical claim is deemed preexisting, and issue cash if you cancel for a covered reason. Generally, the cancellation penalty imposed by the cruise line would be 100% of the cruise fare—for example, if you cancel a few days before the cruise (assuming you've paid in full)—or it could be just $300 if you cancel right after making the initial cruise deposit. Be sure the coverage offered is truly an insurance policy. In some cases, the coverage is really a cancellation waiver that provides credit for a future cruise under limited conditions.

Sounds like the third-party policies win hands down, right? Well, to make it just a little more complicated, a handful of cruise line policies are actually better in some areas than outside policies. For example, **Princess Cruises** has an insurance policy that allows you to cancel for all the reasons that an outside policy would (illness, injury) and get cash reimbursement, or it will let you cancel for any reason whatsoever (from fear of flying to a bad hair day) up until the day of departure and have 75% to 90% of the normal penalty for canceling your cruise applied toward a future trip. **Norwegian, Celebrity,** and **Royal Caribbean** have similar "any reason" policies, which provide a cruise credit for up to 75%.

For an extra 3% of your total Silversea vacation cost when purchased with a travel insurance product that contains trip cancellation benefits (or 8% of vacation cost if purchased alone), high-end **Silversea** allows you to cancel cruises for any reason 1 to 90 days before sailing and get a credit for 100% of the penalty amount (including airfare, if booked through Silversea), applicable toward any cruise during the following 12 months.

Many other lines have similar cancellation plans. The cruise lines using the BerkelyCare policies (see above) also reimburse passengers for days missed on a cruise—say, if you missed your flight and had to join up with the cruise 2 days later—covering hotel costs during the missed days and transportation to the ship (though typically only to a max of $500), as do third-party policies. Keep in mind, cruise line policies do change, so before purchasing insurance, be sure you understand exactly what you're getting.

12 Putting Down a Deposit & Reviewing Tickets

If you're booking several months or more ahead of time, then you have to leave a deposit to secure the booking; if you're booking at the last minute, the full fare will be due when you make the reservation. Depending on the policy of the line you selected, the deposit will either be fixed at a predetermined amount or represent a percentage of the ticket's total cost. The length of time that cruise lines will hold a cabin without a

deposit is getting shorter by the minute. It seems pretty clear, in this age of near-obsessive "shopping around," that the cruise lines are doing their part to discourage it. It used to be that a cruise could be held for a week before you had to plunk down cash; most lines have now shortened this window to 1 to 3 days (exceptions include exotic itineraries that aren't ultracompetitive). Carnival, for instance, requires a deposit within 24 hours. Last-minute bookings may even have a window of a few hours or less.

The balance of the cruise price is due anywhere from 60 to 90 days before you depart; holiday cruises may require final payments earlier, perhaps 90 days before departure; and for some long cruises, it may be 120 days or more before you depart. The payment schedule for deposits on groups is often more liberal. Booking at the last minute usually requires payment in full at the time of booking.

Credit card payments are made directly to the cruise line, but payments by check are made out to the agency, which then passes payment on to the cruise line. As we've said repeatedly, it's preferable to pay by credit card, for the added protection.

"Except in certain circumstances, if the travel agency asks, prefers, or insists on running your credit card through the agency processing terminal, it is a *major* red flag that most often should send you running from the building," says Charlie Funk, co-owner of Just Cruisin' Plus in Nashville. The only exception to this is when an agency is doing a charter or group with special entertainment or features, and the cruise is offered only through the agency.

Carefully review your ticket, invoice, itinerary, and/or vouchers to confirm that they accurately reflect the departure date, ship, and cabin category you booked. The printout usually lists a specific cabin number; if it doesn't, it designates a cabin category. Your exact cabin location may sometimes not be assigned to you until you board the ship.

If you need to cancel your cruise after putting down a deposit, you'll get all or most of your money back, depending on how close you are to departure. With Royal Caribbean, for instance, customers get a 100% refund if they cancel more than 70 days ahead. Less than 30 days from the cruise, the refund drops to 50%, and within the last week, it's your loss. Note that some travel agencies charge an administrative fee for cancellation, regardless of whether the cruise line does or does not. More service-oriented agencies tend not to charge these fees in most cases. Always ask *before* handing over your credit card number.

3

Things to Know Before You Go

You've bought your ticket and you're getting ready to cruise. Here are a few details you need to consider before setting sail.

1 Passports & Visas

Got a passport? If your ship docks at any foreign port—even a blatantly unforeign foreign port like Vancouver, Canada—you'll need one. It didn't used to be that way. For decades, U.S.-based cruise ships operated under rules that permitted U.S. citizens to travel to Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean without need of a passport, but that all changed in January 2007, when the **Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative** began requiring U.S. citizens to possess a valid passport if they want to reenter the U.S. after traveling outside the country. The second phase, covering people traveling by land and sea, went into effect June 1, 2009.

If you don't have a passport or you need to replace an expired one, the **U.S. State Department website** (http://travel.state.gov) provides information. You can also inquire at your local passport acceptance facility, or call the **National Passport Information Center** (✆ **877/487-2778**). Fees for new passports are $100 adults, $85 children 15 and under. Renewals cost $75. If you're in a hurry, you can pay an additional $60 fee to have your passport expedited for delivery within 2 weeks.

As you would before any trip abroad, make two photocopies of your documents and ID. Take one copy with you as a backup (keeping it in a different piece of luggage from the one holding your originals) and keep one copy at home.

After accepting your passport to board ship at the beginning of your cruise, the cruise line might hang onto it for the duration of your cruise, thus allowing the line to facilitate clearance procedures quickly at each port. Don't worry, this is normal. Your documents will be returned after the ship has departed the last foreign port of call, en route back to your home port.

Non-U.S./Canadian citizens departing from and/or returning to the U.S./Canada should check with their travel agent or cruise line to determine the required paperwork. Generally, you'll need a valid passport, alien-registration card as applicable, and occasionally a visa, as required by the individual countries you're visiting.

2 Money Matters

Know how they say cruises are all-inclusive vacations? They're lying. True, the bulk of your vacation expense is covered in the fare, but there are plenty of extras. We've detailed the specifics in section 3, "The Cost: What's Included & What's Not," in chapter 2. In this section, we'll examine the way monetary transactions are handled on board and in port.

Vaccinations Required?

Travel to the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central America does not generally warrant inoculations against tropical diseases, though the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) sometimes recommends prescription antimalarial drugs if conditions in certain destinations warrant. CDC recommendations and warnings can be viewed at **wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx**.

ONBOARD CHARGE CARDS

Cruise ships operate on a cashless basis. Basically, this means you have a running tab and simply sign for what you buy on board during your cruise (bar drinks, meals at specialty restaurants, spa treatments, shore excursions, gift-shop purchases, and so on) and then pay up at the end. Very convenient, yes—and also very, very easy to forget your limits and spend more than you had intended.

Shortly before or after embarkation, a purser or check-in clerk will take an imprint of your credit card and issue you an **onboard charge card.** On the vast majority of ships, it also serves as both your room key and cruise ID, which you swipe through a scanner every time you leave or return to the ship. Small-ship lines that carry 100 or fewer passengers often forgo this kind of ID, and just ask for your cabin number when you're making onboard purchases.

On the last night of your cruise, an **itemized account** of all your charges will be slipped beneath your cabin door. If you agree with the charges, they'll automatically be billed to your credit card. If you'd rather pay in cash or if you dispute any charge, you'll need to stop by the office of the ship's cashier or purser. There may be a long waiting line, so don't go unless you have to.

BRINGING CASH ASHORE

The cashless system works just fine aboard ship, but remember, **you'll need cash in port.** Many people get so accustomed to not carrying their wallets aboard ship that they get off in port and find themselves without any money in their pockets. This is a minor inconvenience if your ship is docked and you have to trudge back aboard for cash, but a major annoyance if it's anchored offshore and you spend an hour ferrying back and forth by boat.

Credit cards are accepted at most port shops, but we recommend having some cash, ideally in small denominations, to cover the cost of taxi rides, tips for tour leaders, or purchases you make from crafts markets and street vendors. Information on local currency is included in chapters 9 through 16, but for the most part you don't have to worry about exchanging money at all. In the Caribbean, the U.S. dollar is the legal currency of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and (oddly enough) the British Virgin Islands, but vendors on islands that have their own currency almost always accept U.S. dollars too. Mexican, Central American, and Canadian ports are similarly dollar-friendly, and Alaska, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Maine are, of course, states.

If you're running low on cash, **ATMs** are easy to find in every cruise port covered in this guide, often right at the cruise terminal. Remember that you'll get local currency from machines where the dollar isn't the legal tender, so don't withdraw more than you need. Many megaships also have ATMs (usually near the casino—surprise, surprise),

but you can expect to be charged a hefty fee for using them—up to $5 in addition to what your bank charges you.

Many lines will cash **traveler's checks** at the purser's desk, and sometimes **personal checks** of up to about $200 to $250 (but sometimes only when accompanied by an American Express card, for guarantee). You can also often get a cash advance through your Visa, MasterCard, or Discover card.

Except aboard some of the ultraluxury lines, **gratuities for the crew** are not normally included in the cruise rates, though many lines these days either automatically add a suggested gratuity to your end-of-cruise bill or give you the option of charging gratuities. Where this is not the case, you should reserve some cash so that you won't feel like Scrooge at the end of the cruise. See "Tipping, Customs & Other End-of-Cruise Concerns," later in this chapter, for more about the subject.

3 Keeping in Touch While at Sea

Some people take a cruise to get away from it all, but others are communication addicts. For them, today's mainstream and luxury vessels (and some small ships) provide a spectrum of ways to keep in touch.

CELLPHONES & SAT PHONES

All of the mainstream and most of the luxury lines in this book are wired with technology that enables cellphone users to make and receive calls aboard ship, even when far out at sea. The small ships in chapter 8 (and SeaDream's two luxury small ships in chapter 7) do not offer this service.

Cellphone service is enabled once a ship sails beyond the range of shore-side towers, typically at about 12 miles. Calls are billed through your regular carrier according to its usual roaming rates, which can vary depending on the provider and sometimes on where in the world you're calling from. Rates typically range between $2 and $3 per minute, with some going as high as $5. That's not cheap, but it's nowhere near the average $8 or $9 per minute (and sometimes up to $15 a min.) that cruise lines typically charge for **in-cabin satellite-phone service.** Text messages from cellphones and e-mails sent from PDAs are more affordable, sometimes costing only a few cents, making them a great idea for couples and families trying to find each other aboard very large megaships.

In addition to cell service and in-cabin SAT phones, each ship has a **central phone number, fax number, and e-mail address,** which are sometimes in the cruise line's brochure and usually in the documents you'll get with your tickets. Distribute these to family members or friends in case they have to contact you in an emergency. It's also a good idea to leave behind the numbers of the cruise line's headquarters and/or reservations department, both of whom will be able to put people in touch with you.

INTERNET & E-MAIL AT SEA

Aside from some of the small, adventure-oriented ships in chapter 8, almost every cruise ship has an Internet center where passengers can send and receive e-mail and browse the Internet. Most are open around the clock, and many offer basic classes for computer novices.

E-mail access is usually available through the Web via your Earthlink, AOL, Hotmail, Yahoo!, or other personal account, with charges calculated on a per-minute basis

(usually 50¢–$1) or in prepurchased blocks (say, $40 for a 3- or 4-night cruise or $90 for a 7-night cruise). A few ships still provide e-mail through temporary accounts you set up once aboard ship, with rates averaging roughly $1 to $4 per message.

Wireless Internet (Wi-Fi) is available aboard the majority of the mainstream and luxury ships in this book, excepting those in the Costa and SeaDream fleets. It's generally usable in designated areas such as the atrium and some public rooms, and sometimes in cabins. A few ships—the small luxury ships of Seabourn and Silversea, the three Regent Seven Seas vessels, and the huge *Carnival Valor*—have wireless access everywhere on board. Among the small ships in chapter 8, only the Lindblad Expeditions and Windstar vessels offer Wi-Fi.

To take advantage of Wi-Fi service, you must have a wireless card for your laptop, rent a card, or rent a laptop, then purchase minutes on the basis of actual use or in packages. Some ships also offer hard-wired **dataports** in all, most, or some cabins and suites.

KEEPING ON TOP OF THE NEWS

Most ships have CNN or other news stations as part of their regular TV lineup. Some ships also maintain the old tradition of reprinting headline news stories pulled off the wire and slipping them under passengers' doors each morning.

4 Packing for the Different Cruise Climates

One of the great things about cruising is that even though you'll be visiting several countries (or at least several ports) on a typical weeklong itinerary, you won't be living out of your suitcase: You just check into your cabin on day one, put your clothes in the closet, and settle in. The destinations come to you. But what exactly do you need to pack? Evening wear aboard ship is about the same wherever you go, but your destination definitely affects what you'll need during the day.

SHIPBOARD DRESS CODES (OR LACK THEREOF)

Ever since Norwegian Cruise Line started the casual trend back at the turn of the 21st century, cruise lines have been toning down or turning off their dress codes. During the day, no matter what the itinerary, you'll find T-shirts, polo shirts, and shorts or khakis predominating, plus casual dresses for women and sweatshirts or light sweaters to compensate for the air-conditioning. The vibe is about the same on the luxury lines, where polos and khakis probably sport fancier labels.

Tuxedo Rentals

Despite the casual trend, there's usually a contingent of folks on board who like to get all decked out. If you don't own a tuxedo or don't want to bother lugging one along, you can often arrange a rental through the cruise line or your travel agent for about $85 to $160 (the higher prices for packages with shirts and both black tuxedo jackets and white dinner jackets). Shoes can be rented for an additional $15 or so. In some cases, a rental offer arrives with your cruise tickets; if not, a call to your travel agent or the cruise line can facilitate a rental. If you choose this option, your suit will be waiting in your cabin upon arrival.

Evening wear aboard ship used to be a lot more complicated than it is today. On most contemporary lines, **formal nights** have either melted away entirely or slid closer to what used to be considered semiformal. When Oceania Cruises started up in 2003, for example, its dress code was set as "country club casual" every single night, on every voyage. NCL has also basically ditched formal nights, though its "optional formal" captain's cocktail night accommodates those who choose to dress up. Disney Cruise Line has toned formality down to the point where a sports jacket is considered dressy enough. Most other mainstream lines still have two traditional formal nights during any 7-night itinerary (usually the second and next-to-last nights of the cruise, the former for the captain's cocktail party). For these, imagine what you'd wear to a nice wedding: Men are encouraged to wear tuxedos or dark suits; women cocktail dresses, sequined jackets, gowns, or other fancy attire. If you just hate dressing up, women can get away with a blouse and skirt or pants—and, of course, jewelry, scarves, and other accessories can dress up an otherwise nondescript outfit. (Most cabins have personal safes where you can keep your good jewelry when you're not wearing it.) Men can get away with a blue blazer and tie.

Casual nights (sometimes called "smart casual" or something similar) make up the rest of the week, though some cruise lines still cling to an old distinction between full casual (decent pants and collared shirts for men, and maybe a sports jacket; dresses, skirts, or pantsuits for women) and informal or semiformal (suits or sports jackets; stylish dresses or pantsuits). Suggested dress for the evening is usually printed in the ship's daily schedule. Cruise lines also typically describe dress codes in their brochures and websites.

Most of the **ultraluxury lines** maintain the same ratio of formal, semiformal, and casual nights, with passengers tending to dress on the high end of all those categories. Tuxedos are very common. That said, even the luxe lines are relaxing their dress standards. Seabourn doesn't request ties for men anymore except on formal nights, and Windstar and SeaDream have a casual "no jackets required" policy every day, though dinners usually have some men in sports jackets and women in nice dresses.

Aboard all the **small-ship lines** covered in this book, it's very rare to see anything dressier than a sports jacket at any time, and even those are rare. Most of these lines are 100% casual 100% of the time, with passengers sometimes changing into clean shirts, trousers, and dresses for dinner.

DRESSING FOR YOUR DESTINATION

The cruise destinations covered in this book divide easily into warm-weather regions (Caribbean, The Bahamas, Central America, Mexican Riviera, Hawaii, and Bermuda) and the cooler northern regions of Alaska and its milder neighbor on the other side of the continent, New England/Canada.

WARM-WEATHER ITINERARIES

In the **Caribbean** and **The Bahamas,** the temperature stays within a fairly narrow range year-round, averaging between 75° and 85°F (24°–29°C), though in summer the combination of sun and humidity can get very intense, especially at midafternoon. Trade winds help cool things off on many of the islands, as does rainfall, which differs from island to island—Aruba, for instance, is very dry, while it seems to rain briefly every time we're in Nassau. Winter is generally the driest season throughout the region; but even then, it can be wet in mountainous areas, and afternoon showers

Average Temperatures in the Cruise Regions*

Destination	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Eastern Caribbean	70/83	70/84	71/85	73/86	74/87	76/87	76/88	76/89	76/89	75/88	74/86	72/84
Western Caribbean	65/82	66/84	72/86	73/90	75/90	75/90	75/90	75/91	75/90	73/86	72/84	70/82
Southern Caribbean	73/82	73/82	73/84	75/88	76/88	76/88	77/88	77/88	77/88	76/87	77/84	74/83
Panama Canal/ Central America	76/84	76/84	76/85	77/86	76/87	75/86	75/85	75/85	75/87	74/86	74/84	75/84
Southeast Alaska	19/29	23/34	27/39	32/47	39/55	45/61	48/64	47/63	43/56	37/47	27/37	23/32
Mexican Riviera	72/87	72/87	72/87	72/87	76/89	77/89	77/89	77/89	77/88	77/88	75/88	73/88
Bermuda	61/69	60/68	60/69	63/71	68/75	73/81	77/85	78/86	76/84	72/80	67/75	63/70
Hawaii	65/78	65/78	66/78	68/79	70/81	72/83	73/84	74/85	73/85	72/83	70/81	67/79
Canada/New England*	19/30	19/30	25/40	34/48	41/57	50/66	57/73	57/73	54/68	45/57	36/48	25/37

** Temperatures are in degrees Fahrenheit, representing average lows and highs. Canada/New England temperatures represent Halifax, Nova Scotia; temperatures farther south along the coast will be on the high side of the temperature range.* ***Note:*** *Humidity can make summer temperatures in warm-weather destinations seem hotter, while Alaska's damp climate can make its summer temperatures seem colder.*

often give the shores a good soaking, sometimes just for a few minutes, sometimes for hours. Temperatures on Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula and in **Central America** can feel much hotter, especially on shore excursions to the humid interior regions. **Hurricane season** lasts officially from June 1 to November 30, traditionally the low cruise season.

The **Mexican Riviera** is traditionally sunny, with average daytime temperatures in the mid-80s. Showers are brief and usually occur at night, when the temperature drops by about 10 degrees. Humidity is moderate during the November to April dry season and higher from May to October.

Hawaii is, of course, paradise. Along the coast, daytime temperatures are usually between the mid-70s and mid-80s, while the mountains can be quite a bit cooler, with summer daytime temperatures in the 60s. On the leeward side of the islands, away from the wind, temperatures occasionally get into the low 90s, while the high slopes of Mauna Kea, the state's highest volcanic peak, are regularly covered with snow in the winter.

Bermuda, too, enjoys a wonderfully temperate climate due to the proximity of the Gulf Stream, which flows between the island and North America. There's no rainy season and no typical month of excess rain. Showers may be heavy at times, but the skies usually clear quickly. During the April-to-October cruise season, temperatures stay in the mid-70s to mid-80s, and even in summer the temperature rarely rises above 85°F (29°C), with a breeze cooling things down at night.

WHAT TO PACK No matter which warm-weather region you visit, casual daytime wear aboard ship means shorts, T-shirts or polos, sundresses, and bathing suits (plus coverups and sandals if you go right from your deck chair to one of the restaurants or public rooms). The same dress code works in port too, but in many places it's best to cover that skimpy bikini top if straying from the beach area. Bring a good pair of **walking shoes** or sandals if you intend to do more than lie on the beach. A pair of cheap **aqua-socks** might also be a good idea if you plan to snorkel, take inflatable launches to shore, participate in watersports, or do any shore excursions that traverse wet, rocky terrain. A folding umbrella or lightweight raincoat or poncho is a good idea for destinations that have regular tropical showers.

Last, remember to pack sunglasses, a hat, and **sunscreen.** All are available aboard ship and in the ports, but sunscreen in particular will be a lot cheaper at your local market than in a gift shop. You might also consider bringing a **plastic water bottle** that you can refill aboard ship, rather than buying overpriced bottled water in port. And if you plan on hitting the gym aboard ship, don't forget your **workout clothes and sneakers.**

ALASKA ITINERARIES

While Southeast Alaska, where most cruises sail, has more temperate year-round weather than the rest of the state, summers there are still unpredictable. In May, when the cruise season gets going, we've experienced icy rain at the waterline and hiked in new snow at the top of Juneau's Mount Roberts—but we've also seen a lot of beautiful, crisp, sunny days. June is the driest of the true summer months, July the warmest (and also the busiest), and August the month with the most rain. Rainy weather usually continues into September, though we've sailed here as the season wrapped up and had sunny days all week long. Some towns are rainier than others no matter what time you sail—Ketchikan, for instance, gets about 150 inches of precipitation annually, more than three times Juneau's total. In general, daytime summer temperatures are usually in the 50s and 60s, though the damp climate can make it seem colder (as can wind, proximity to glaciers, and excursions to higher elevations). Some days can also be nicely warm, getting up into the 70s or occasionally into the 80s. The all-time high temperature in Juneau was 90°F (32°C) in July 1975—a rarity.

This far south, you won't experience the famed **Midnight Sun,** though days still seem to go on forever. In June, Juneau gets about 18 hours of sunlight—sometimes at 10pm there's still enough to read by. Farther north, in Anchorage, Denali, and Fairbanks, the sun dips below the horizon for only a little more than 4 hours on some June days. Summer temperatures here are roughly comparable to those in Southeast Alaska.

WHAT TO PACK The rule for Alaska is layering. In addition to some lightweight clothing to wear aboard ship (including a bathing suit, as most megaships have covered pool areas), you'll want to bring some variation of the following items for daytime use:

- A lightweight, waterproof jacket
- Two sweaters or fleece pullovers, or substitute a warm vest for one
- Two to four pairs of pants or jeans
- Two pairs of walking shoes (preferably waterproof)
- A warm hat and gloves
- Long underwear if you're on a May/September shoulder-season cruise
- A folding umbrella

Despite the cool temperatures and sometimes overcast conditions, you'll still want to pack **sunglasses and sunscreen,** especially if you'll be doing a lot of active shore excursions or spending a lot of time on deck whale-watching. That's also the reason you'll want to bring **binoculars** and/or a good **camera,** preferably with a telephoto or zoom lens and with lots of digital memory or film. Regarding binoculars, many of the small-ship adventure lines have enough aboard for all passengers, but it can't hurt to bring your own if you have them. Because whales, eagles, and bears aren't the only wildlife in Alaska, you'll also do well to pack some **mosquito repellent.** Bugs aren't as

big a problem in Southeast Alaska as in the more central parts of the state, but if you get into the forest on shore excursions, they can still be annoying.

EASTERN CANADA/NEW ENGLAND ITINERARIES

Temperatures on summer Canada/New England cruises are usually very pleasant, averaging in the 60s and 70s. Temperatures in Nova Scotia will be on the low end of that scale, often dipping into the 50s at night, while you can expect hot temperatures if you're sailing from New York, where summer days are often in the 80s or 90s. Temperatures in Boston are usually in the 70s in summer. On September/October fall-foliage cruises, expect temperatures in Canada to range from the low 40s to the low 60s. Rainwise, the situation is unpredictable. We've experienced bright, crisp, sunny days, then immediately have been socked with a full 24-hour storm. Fog is also common, especially on New Brunswick's Fundy Coast and the Atlantic Coast of Nova Scotia.

WHAT TO PACK A lighter version of layering is called for here, with a long-sleeved shirt or light sweater over your T-shirts, polos, and dresses. Pack a combination of shorts and long casual pants as well, plus good walking shoes and a light jacket for the evenings. Fall cruises call for slightly heavier clothing, but you'll rarely experience bone-chilling cold. As always, remember your sunblock, sunglasses, hat, and folding umbrella.

SUNDRIES

Except on the small ships, most vessels have **laundry service** on board and some dry cleaning, too, with about 24-hour turnaround; a price list will be in your cabin. Cleaning services tend not to be cheap—$1 or $1.50 per pair of socks, $2.50 to $3 for a T-shirt, and $10 to dry-clean a suit—so if you plan to pack light and wear the same outfit several times, consider the self-service laundry rooms aboard some ships (Carnival, Crystal, Princess, and Holland America, among others). The small-ship lines rarely provide laundry services.

Like hotel rooms, most cabins (especially those aboard the newest and the most high-end ships) come with **toiletries** such as soap, shampoo, conditioner, and lotion, but their quality varies. Bring your own products if you prefer them. If you forget something, all but a few of the smallest ships in this book have at least one shop on board, selling razor blades, toothbrushes, sunscreen, film, and other sundries, usually at inflated prices.

Most cabins also have **hair dryers** (the "Cabins & Rates" charts in chapters 6–8 tell you which have them and which don't), but they tend to be weak, so don't expect miracles—if you have a lot of hair, bring your own. All ships reviewed in this book run on **110 AC current** (both 110 and 220 on many), so North Americans won't need an electrical adapter.

You don't need to pack a **beach towel,** as they're almost always supplied on board (again, except aboard some small-ship lines). Bird-watchers and whale-watchers will want their **binoculars** and manuals, golfers their clubs (unless they intend to rent), and snorkelers their gear (which can also be rented, usually through the cruise lines).

If you like to read but don't want to lug hefty novels on board, most ships of all sizes have **libraries** stocked with books and magazines. Some (such as the one on Cunard's *QM2*) are fantastic, while others are pretty bad. Most ships also stock paperback best-sellers in their shops.

5 Tipping, Customs & Other End-of-Cruise Concerns

We know you don't want to hear about the end of your cruise before you've even gone on it, but we had to fit in this information somewhere.

TIPPING

Most cruise lines pay their service staffs low base wages with the understanding that the bulk of the staff's income will come from tips. Each line has clear guidelines for gratuities, which are usually printed in their brochures and on their websites, on your cruise documents, and in the daily schedule toward the end of your trip. The traditional way of tipping was to simply hand your waiter, assistant waiter, and cabin steward cash in a little envelope, but these days many lines add an **automatic gratuity** (sometimes called a "service charge") to a passenger's onboard account—generally between $8.50 and $12 per person, per day total, with the amount adjustable up or down if requested at the purser's desk before the end of the cruise. Other lines give you the option of paying cash directly to staff or adding the gratuities onto your account. Some small-ship lines pool the tips and divide them equitably among all crew. The ultraluxury lines tend to include tips in the cruise rates.

Among lines that don't add an automatic charge, **suggested tipping amounts** vary slightly with the line and its degree of luxury, from about $8 to $14 total per passenger, per day. As a rule of thumb, each passenger (not each couple) should expect to tip at least $3.50 per day for the cabin steward, $3.50 for the dining room waiter, and about $2 for the assistant waiter, and sometimes 75¢ for the headwaiter. Some lines suggest you tip the maitre d' about $5 per person for the week and slip another couple bucks to the chief housekeeper, but it's your choice. If you've never even met these people, don't bother. Guests staying in suites with butler service should also send $3.50 per day his way. A 15% gratuity is usually included on every **bar bill** to cover gratuities to bartenders and wine stewards. The captain and other professional officers do not get tips. That'd be like tipping your doctor.

Information on how each cruise line deals with gratuities is included in the "Service" section of each line review in chapters 6 through 8.

Higher suggested gratuities sometimes apply to guests booked in suites. Those folks sometimes have a butler to tip as well, which increases the total amount. Automatic gratuities are sometimes waived for young children.

On lines that follow traditional person-to-person gratuity policies, tip your waiter and assistant waiter during the cruise's final dinner, and leave your cabin steward his or her tip on the final night or morning, just before you disembark. Tip **spa personnel** immediately after they work on you, but note that on some ships, the spa will automatically add a tip to your account unless you indicate otherwise, so inquire before adding one yourself.

DEBARKATION

It's a good idea to begin packing before dinner on your final night aboard. Be sure to fill out the **luggage tags** given to you and attach them securely to each piece. Most ships ask that you leave your luggage outside your cabin door by midnight or so, after which service staff will pick it up and spirit it away. Two points here: (1) First-time cruisers always worry about leaving their bags out in public, but we've never heard an instance of anything being stolen; and (2) because ship's personnel have to get thousands of pieces of luggage into bins and off the ship, don't expect your luggage to be

treated gently. Rather than packing bottles of duty-free liquor and other breakables, carry them off the ship yourself.

Once you debark, you'll find the bags waiting in the terminal, organized by the colored or numbered tags you attached. Attendants stand by to help if your baggage is not where it's supposed to be.

Ships normally arrive in port on the final day between 6 and 8am, and need at least 90 minutes to unload baggage and complete docking formalities. Debarkation rarely begins much before 9am, and sometimes it may be 10am before you're allowed to leave the ship, usually via debarkation numbers assigned based on flight times. (Not surprisingly, suite passengers get expedited debarkation.) Have breakfast. Have coffee. Have patience.

In the cruise ship terminal, claim your luggage and then pass through **Customs** before exiting. This normally entails handing the officer your filled-out declaration form as you breeze past, but occasionally the officers will ask to look in your bags. There are generally porters available in the terminals (to whom it's traditional to pay about $2 per bag carried), but you'll have to haul your luggage through Customs before you can get to them.

U.S. CUSTOMS

Except for some small-ship itineraries in Alaska and along U.S. rivers and coasts, and NCL's cruises in Hawaii, all the other ships in this book will visit at least one foreign port on their itinerary, meaning you'll have to go through Customs and be subject to duty-free purchase allowances when you return. We've found clearing Customs at U.S. cruise ports usually painless and speedy, with officials rarely asking for anything more than your filled-out declaration form as they nod you through. Better safe than sorry, though, so keep receipts for all purchases you make abroad. If you use any medication containing controlled substances or requiring injection, carry an original prescription or note from your doctor.

The standard personal duty-free allowance for U.S. citizens is $800, an amount that applies to **Mexico, Canada,** and most of the **Caribbean** islands. There are also limits on the amount of alcoholic beverages (usually 1 liter), cigarettes (1 carton), cigars (100 total, and no Cubans), and other tobacco products you may include in your personal duty-free exemption. If returning directly from the **U.S. Virgin Islands,** you may bring in $1,600 worth of merchandise duty-free, including 5 liters of alcohol, of which at least 1 liter should be a product of those islands.

As you may be visiting both foreign and U.S.-territory ports, things get more complicated; if, for instance, your cruise stops in the U.S. Virgin Islands and The Bahamas, your total limit is $1,600, of which no more than $800 can be from The Bahamas.

Joint Customs declarations are possible for family members traveling together. For instance, for a husband and wife with two children, the total duty-free exemption from most destinations would be $3,200.

Note that most meat or meat products, fruit, plants, vegetables, or plant-derived products will be seized by U.S. Customs agents unless they're accompanied by an import license from a U.S. government agency. The same import rules apply even if you are returning from Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

For more specifics, visit the **U.S. Customs Service** website at **www.customs.gov**. Canadian citizens should look at the **Canada Border Services Agency** site (**www.cbsa.gc.ca**), and citizens of the U.K. should visit the **U.K. Customs and Excise** site (**www.hmce.gov.uk**).

4

The Cruise Experience

Cruise ships evolved from ocean liners, which were once the only way of getting across the ocean from point A to point B. This was often no easy matter, entailing a real journey of several weeks, often in harsh weather. Competition quickly came down to two elements over which the shipping lines had some control: speed ("Get me off this damn ship as fast as possible") and comfort ("Don't rush on my account; I'm having a great time"). While the former was great for businessmen in a rush, the latter had more intriguing possibilities. It wasn't long before ship owners began offering pleasure cruises around scenic parts of the world, lavishing their passengers with shipboard comforts between ports of call—and thus the cruise industry was born.

Today, though the cruise experience varies from ship to ship, the common denominator is choice, with nonstop entertainment and activities, numerous dining options, and opportunities to be as sociable or as private as you desire. On most of the big ships, you can run from an aerobics class to ballroom dancing, then to a computer class or informal lecture, then to a wine-tasting session or goofy poolside contest—all before lunch. For warm-weather itineraries, you can do nothing more than sunbathe in a quiet corner of the deck all day; in Alaska, you can camp out on deck with your binoculars, scanning for whales. It's your choice. In the pages that follow, we'll give you a taste of life at sea, circa 2010.

1 Checking In, Boarding & Settling into Your Cabin

It's cruise day. If you've flown to your city of embarkation, uniformed attendants will be waiting at the airport baggage claim, holding signs bearing your cruise line's or ship's name and ready to direct you to buses bound for the terminal. You've probably already paid for these **transfers** when you bought your ticket. If not, you can arrange them now, or take a taxi to the ship. If you've driven to the port, it's just a matter of parking and trundling your luggage into the terminal. If it's still morning or early afternoon, don't feel rushed: Remember, another shipload of passengers is just getting off, and cabins still need to be cleaned, supplies loaded, and paperwork and Customs documents completed before you can board. Even if your ship has been berthed since 6am, new passengers are often not allowed on board until about 1pm, though lines are increasingly offering **preboarding**—which means you can get on at 11am or noon, have lunch, and start checking out the ship, though your cabin probably won't be ready till early afternoon. Due to U.S. Customs and Border Protection requirements, passengers must be checked in and on board at least an hour prior to sailing, though each line has its own rules, with most asking all passengers to be aboard at least 2 hours ahead of time.

A Brief History of Cruising

It wasn't until the late 19th century that British shipping companies realized they could profit not just by transporting travelers, cargo, mail, and immigrants from point A to point B, but also by selling a luxurious experience at sea. Most historians agree that the first cruise ship was Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company's *Ceylon,* which in 1881 was converted to a lavish cruising yacht for carrying wealthy guests on world cruises. A few years later, in 1887, North of Scotland, Orkney & Shetland Steam Navigation's *St. Sunniva* was launched as the first steamer built expressly for cruising.

The Germans joined the cruise trade in 1891 when the Hamburg-America Line sent its *Augusta Victoria* on a Mediterranean cruise. During the early 1900s, more and more players entered the picture, spending warmer seasons crossing the Atlantic and Pacific and the rest of the year offering pleasure cruises. During these boom years, competition became fierce between famous shipping lines such as **Cunard,** White Star, Hamburg-America, French Line, North German Lloyd, **Holland America,** Red Star Line, and others, which all sought to attract customers by building the largest, fastest, or most luxurious new vessels, with extravagant appointments not found on modern cruise ships—stained-glass ceilings, frescoes, ornate wooden stairways, and even plaster walls. (Oddly, onboard activities and entertainment were relatively sparse amid all the grandeur. Besides lavish social dinners, about the only pastimes were reading, walking around the deck, and sitting for musical recitals.) These same ships, with their first-class ballrooms, smoking lounges, and suites decorated with the finest chandeliers, Oriental rugs, and artwork, also carried immigrants in inexpensive, bare-bones steerage accommodations, with second-class cabins available between these two polar extremes. This multiclass system survived until the late 1960s, and even today you can see vestiges of it in the dining rooms on Cunard's *QM2* and *Queen Victoria,* which are assigned to passengers depending on the level of cabin or suite they book.

Soon after Cunard launched its popular 2,165-passenger ***Mauretania*** and ***Lusitania*** in 1906, the White Star Line's J. Bruce Ismay envisioned a trio of the largest and most luxurious passenger vessels ever built, designed to appeal to rich American industrialists. The first of these sisters, the 2,584-passenger, 46,000-ton *Olympic,* was in service by 1911, introduced with such fanfare that the 1912 launch of the second sister, ***Titanic,*** was not nearly as anticipated. Still, that ship soon became the most famous of all time, through the most tragic of circumstances. Vestiges of Ismay's dream ships survive today on Celebrity Cruise's *Millennium,* whose alternative restaurant is decorated with original carved wall panels from the *Olympic,* salvaged before the ship was scrapped in 1935.

The Brits and Germans continued building bigger and bigger ships up until **World War I,** when almost all vessels were requisitioned to carry soldiers, supplies, and weaponry. Many grand ships were lost in the conflict,

including Cunard's *Lusitania* and the third member of Ismay's trio, launched in 1914 as the *Britannic* and sunk by a mine in 1916.

After World War I, the popularity of cruising increased tremendously, and more ships were routed to the Caribbean and the Mediterranean for long, expensive cruises—Cunard's *Mauretania* and its new running mate *Aquitania* were both yanked off the Atlantic for a millionaire's romp through the Mediterranean, carrying as few as 200 pampered passengers in the lap of luxury. As they headed to warmer climes, many ships' traditional black hulls were painted white to help them stay cool in those pre-air-conditioning days. This became a tradition itself, to the point where in the 1960s and 1970s, nearly all ships sailing in the Caribbean and western Mexico had white hulls.

By the 1930s, shipboard activities and amenities were becoming much more sophisticated, with morning concerts, quoits, shuffleboard, bridge, Ping-Pong, motion pictures, and the first "swimming baths" (pools) appearing on board, which usually consisted of burlap or canvas slung over wooden supports and filled with water. The first permanent outdoor pools appeared in the 1920s, and in the 1930s the large outdoor pool on the *Rex* actually included a patch of sand to evoke Venice's Lido beach. When the great French liner *Normandie* made its maiden voyage in 1935, its first-class dining room boasted the cruising world's first air-conditioning system.

World War II saw the great liners again called into service. Cunard's *Queen Elizabeth* and *Queen Mary* and Holland America's *Nieuw Amsterdam* completed distinguished wartime service and sailed on into the postwar years, but many great liners never made it back to civilian life. *Normandie,* probably the greatest and most beautiful liner of all time, burned and capsized in New York while being converted into a troopship.

Shipboard travel boomed in the 1950s, and for the first time, pleasure cruising became accessible to the growing middle class, with onboard life enhanced by pool games, bingo, art classes, dance lessons, singles' parties, and midnight buffets—all of which you'll still find on ships today. By the 1960s, however, jet planes had replaced ships as the public's transportation of choice, and the boom was over. Increasingly expensive to maintain, many of the great 1950s liners were sent to the scrap yards.

The industry seemed doomed, but in the early 1960s, Norwegian cargo and tanker ship operator Knut Kloster teamed up with Israeli shipping and air-freight man Ted Arison to form **Norwegian Cruise Line,** the first major cruise operation to sail from Miami. It was a tremendous success. **Royal Caribbean Cruise Line** was formed in January 1969 to capitalize on the newly exploding Caribbean cruise market, and in 1971 Ted Arison split from NCL and started **Carnival Cruise Lines.** On the West Coast, **Princess Cruises,** up and running by the mid-1960s, hit the big time in 1977 when two of its ships began starring in the network TV series ***The Love Boat,*** which, for better or worse, became the public's image of cruising for decades to come.

Chapter 9, "The Ports of Embarkation," has more information about flying, driving, and parking at each embarkation port.

When you arrive at the port, you'll find an army of **porters** to help transport your luggage into the terminal (for which you should pay them about $2 per bag) and another army of cruise line employees waiting to direct you to the check-in desks. Once inside, your tagged luggage will be taken, scanned, and delivered to your cabin, sometimes arriving not long after you check in, but more often showing up a few hours later. For this reason, it's a good idea to pack a small **essentials bag** you can carry on board, containing a change of clothes and maybe a swimsuit, plus a pair of sunglasses and any toiletries, medications, or other essentials you may need immediately.

Once in the terminal, you hand over your cruise tickets, show your **passport,** and give an imprint of your credit card to establish your **onboard account** (see "Passports & Visas" and "Money Matters," sections 1 and 2, respectively, in chapter 3, for more about these). Depending upon when you arrive and how large the crowd is, you may find yourself waiting in line for an hour or more, but usually it's less. Many lines nowadays are also offering **online registration** that allows you to take care of a lot of these matters before your cruise, which speeds things up some.

For security reasons, cruise lines do not allow unofficial **visitors** aboard ship, so if friends or relatives brought you to the pier, you'll have to say your goodbyes on land.

Once on board, a steward may lead you to your **cabin** (you don't need to tip him, though we usually do if he's carried our bags), but in many cases you'll have to find it on your own. Your **cabin steward** will probably stop by shortly to introduce him- or herself, inquire if the configuration of beds is appropriate (that is, whether you want separate twin beds or a pushed-together double), and give you his or her phone extension so that you can call if you need anything. If your steward doesn't put in an appearance, feel free to call housekeeping to request anything you need. The brochures and **daily programs** in your cabin will answer many questions about the day's activities, the dress code for dinner that night, and the ship's safety procedures. There may also be a **deck plan** that will help you find your way around. If not, you can pick one up at the guest services desk. Signs near the staircases and elevators should be able to guide you there.

With very few exceptions, cruise ships have **direct-dial telephones** in cabins, along with instructions on how to use them and a directory of phone numbers for the departments or services on board. You can call anywhere in the world from most cabins' phones via satellite, but you'll break the bank to do it, with charges ranging from between $3 and $15 a minute (with $8 or $9 being about average). It's cheaper to call home from your **cellphone** if your ship is appropriately wired, or from a public telephone in port, or to send **e-mail** from the Internet center or, cheaper yet, from an Internet cafe in port. (See section 3, "Keeping in Touch While at Sea," in chapter 3, for more info.)

All ships reviewed in this book have North American–style **electrical outlets** (twin flat prongs, 110 AC current), and some have outlets for both European current (220 AC) and North American. Keep in mind, there's often only one outlet for your curling iron or hair dryer, and it's usually above the desk or dresser rather than in the bathroom.

Most ships also have **in-cabin safes** for storing your valuables, usually operated via a self-set combination. On ships that don't provide them, you can usually check valuable items at the purser's desk.

A **lifeboat safety drill** will be held either just before or after sailing. It's required by the Coast Guard, and attendance is mandatory. Check to make sure your cabin has

enough life preservers for everyone in your party, because you'll have to wear them to the drill. (Hope you look good in orange!) If you need extra lifesavers—or for that matter, additional blankets or pillows—let your steward know ASAP.

2 Exploring the Ports of Call: Shore Excursions vs. Going It on Your Own

How you spend your time in port can make the difference between a great cruise experience and a big fat disappointment. The ports covered in this guide vary greatly, from quiet **untouristed ports** such as Jost Van Dyke, where your ship will likely be the only one in sight, to **superbustling tourist towns** such as Ketchikan, Alaska, which is almost always jampacked with other ships. Due to factors such as accessibility of local transportation, condition of roads, terrain, and the amount of time your ship is in port (which can range from 4 or 5 hours to 10 or more), some ports are easy to **explore independently,** others less so. In the port chapters later in this guide (chapters 10–15), we'll advise you which ports of call are good for solo exploration (and whether you should go it on foot or by taxi, motor scooter, ferry, or otherwise) and where you should sign up for an **organized shore excursion.**

When it comes to exploring on your own, one downside is that you forgo the kind of **narrative** you get from a guide, and you may miss out on some of the historical and cultural nuances of a particular attraction. On the other hand, you may find your own little nuances, things that an organized tour skips over as being too minor to bother with. Touring alone allows you to avoid groups and crowds, and hopefully connect with the destination in a more personal way. When going the solo route, though, be sure you know exactly when your ship departs for the next port, because the captain won't wait forever if you're late, leaving you on your own to get to the next port of call.

Sometimes a port's real attractions may be miles (sometimes a lot of miles) from where your ship is docked—a common enough occurrence in Hawaii, Alaska, and Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, among other places. In such cases, touring on your own could be an inefficient use of your time, entailing lots of hassles and planning, and possibly costing more. In these places, the shore excursions offered by the cruise lines are a good way to go. In each port review, we run through a sampling of both the best excursions and the best sights and activities you can see and do on your own.

Shore excursions run the gamut, from snoresville bus tours and booze cruises to more stimulating options such as snorkeling, jungle walks, whale-watching, and glacier helicopter treks. For those who like a little sweat in their port visits, there are **physically challenging options** such as kayaking, horseback riding, mountain biking, ziplining, dog sledding, and river rafting. There's a decent selection of tours in all the regions covered in this guide (generally at least 10–20 per port), with the greatest number in Alaska, Hawaii, and the Caribbean.

Some things to keep in mind:

- In almost every case, the cruise lines themselves do not operate the excursions; instead, they contract them out to operators in each individual port. That's why most lines seem to offer the same tours, though prices often vary slightly.
- Excursion prices are often (but not always) lower for kids.
- Excursions can often fill up fast, especially on the megaships, so don't dawdle in signing up. If your cruise line is set up for prebooking before your trip, that's a good option. If not, sign up on the first day of your cruise.

Most lines list their shore excursions on their websites, and (with the exception of MSC, SeaDream, and most of the small-ship lines) allow you to **prebook or prereserve them,** either online or through a reservation form that comes with your cruise documents.

If a tour offered by your ship is booked up, you can try to **book it independently** once you get to port. The popular *Atlantis* submarine tour, for example—offered at Grand Cayman, Nassau, and St. Thomas, among other places—usually has an office/agent in the cruise terminals or nearby. In Alaska, as another example, Juneau's popular Mt. Roberts Tramway is located just a few meters from the cruise dock, so it's easy enough to just walk over and buy a ticket yourself.

Other options include contacting an outside company, such as **Port Promotions** (**www.portpromotions.com**), at least a few weeks before your cruise. This tour company will arrange many of the same tours the lines do, often for a few bucks less, and will also put together custom tours tailored to your group's needs. Port Promotions currently has tours in the Caribbean, Alaska, Hawaii, and Europe.

3 A Typical Day at Sea: Onboard Activities

Most of the mainstream lines and the larger luxury ships provide an extensive schedule of activities throughout each day, especially during days when the ship isn't visiting a port. To keep track of the games, lessons, contests, classes, and so on, ships print a **daily program,** which is placed in your cabin while you're at dinner and applies to the next day. A cruise director and his or her staff are in charge of the action and do their best to make sure passengers are having a good time. As a general rule, the smaller the ship, the fewer the activities: Megaships tend to be a veritable hive of activity; midsize ships (like the Oceania trio and most ultraluxury ships) have a low-key roster of events sprinkled throughout the day; and the small-ship lines tend to shun organized activities entirely unless they involve the nature, culture, and history of the cruise destination.

ONBOARD LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

For years, lists of shipboard classes read as if they were lifted straight out of the Eisenhower-era home-entertainment playbook: napkin folding, vegetable carving, scarf tying, mixology, and the like. Old habits die hard, so you'll still find these kinds of things aboard many ships; however, over the past decade the cruise lines have finally started catching up to the modern world. Today, most megaships and midsize ships also offer **informal lectures** on subjects such as history, music, astronomy, health and wellness, personal investing, computers (word processing, digital photography, website design, and so on), and other topics. Don't expect to earn credits toward your college degree—these are mostly hour-long sessions, and tend to be pretty basic—but they make a nice addition to the day.

Many lines also feature **cooking demonstrations** and **wine-tasting seminars,** the former often resembling the kind you see on TV, complete with model kitchen and video monitors for an up-close view of the preparations. Wine tastings are usually conducted by the ship's sommeliers, though some lines bring aboard guest experts. There's usually a charge of about $5 to $15 for wine tastings, with selections coming from the dining room's wine list. Participants may be offered special prices if they care to order wine in advance for dinner.

Dance classes (most frequently salsa, country, and ballroom) are usually held several times a week, taught by one of the onboard entertainers. Staff from the gym, spa, and

salon hold frequent seminars on **health, beauty, and fitness,** with topics including skin and hair care, detox for weight loss, and wrinkle reduction. These seminars are free, but they have an ulterior motive: getting you to sign up for not-so-cheap spa treatments or buy expensive beauty products. Just remember: *You don't have to buy anything.*

In general, the ultraluxury lines have more refined and interesting enrichment programs. **Crystal**'s Creative Learning Institute (CLI), for example, includes some programs run in collaboration with well-known organizations, schools, and brands—Berlitz for language classes, the Cleveland Clinic for health topics, and Yamaha for music classes, to name a few. Otherwise, lectures and classes focus on topics such as wine and food (for example, wine appreciation, spa cuisine), arts and entertainment (fashion design, language instruction), lifestyle (interior design, book clubs), wellness (CPR, tai chi), and business and technology. **Cunard**'s *Queen Mary 2* offers a similar program on its transatlantic crossings, developed in association with Oxford University and featuring talks on history, global politics, cultural trends, theater, science, music, literature, and more.

ONBOARD GAMES

Vacations promote mental health by allowing people to do things they wouldn't ever do at home—for instance, participate in **wacky poolside contests** on days at sea. Almost all the mainstream lines continue this tradition, in which passengers compete to see who can do the best belly-flop, who has the hairiest back, or who can stuff the most Ping-Pong balls into their bathing suit. Sometimes passengers are teamed up for relay races that require members to pass bagels to one another with their teeth. Classic party lines like Costa offer frantic games like the Election of the Ideal Couple, where said couple is judged based on their ability to, for example, **burst balloons with their butts.** Even normally staid cruise lines let their hair down sometimes. At its weekly deck parties, Holland America sometimes features a team **water-bottle relay** in which one person chugs a bottle of water and then, as the line's printed instructions advise, "puts it in their swimsuit." The other team members each get a sponge, which they use to fill that bottle with ice water from a bucket on the other side of the deck.

Game shows, such as the **Newlywed/Not-So-Newlywed Game,** are always popular. Volunteer yourself or just listen to fellow passengers blurt out the truth about their personal lives—just like on *Oprah!* **Disney** and **Carnival** often stage very realistic game-show games, with buzzers, contestant podiums, digital scorekeeping, and prizes.

If you're a performer at heart, volunteer for the weekly **passenger talent show** held aboard many ships. Among the more bizarre displays we've seen: an elderly lady aboard *Norwegian Sun,* wearing red hot pants and heels and lip-synching Shirley Temple's "On the Good Ship Lollipop." Gaming fans can sign up for **trivia quizzes,** do puzzles, or join **chess, checkers, bridge,** and **backgammon tournaments.**

SHIPBOARD CASINOS & GAMES OF CHANCE

Almost every cruise ship has a **casino,** and as a general rule, the bigger the ship, the bigger and flashier its casino, with literally hundreds of slot machines and dozens of roulette, blackjack, poker, and craps tables. Luxury lines such as Regent and Seabourn have scaled-down versions. Stakes aboard most ships are relatively low, with maximum bets rarely exceeding $200. Average minimum bets at blackjack and poker tables are generally $5 or $10; the minimum at roulette is typically 50¢ or $1.

Most ships also have a **card room,** which is occasionally supervised by a full-time instructor. Most ships furnish cards for free, although some charge $1 or so per deck.

Another time-honored shipboard tradition is **horse racing,** a very goofy activity in which toy horses mounted on poles are moved around a track by hand, based on rolls of the dice. Passengers bet on the outcome, and the end of the cruise features an "owner's cup" race and best-dressed-horse show.

Ships are free to allow gambling in international waters, but local laws almost always require onboard casinos to close down whenever a ship is in port. Big gamblers should keep this in mind when cruising to Bermuda, where ships stay in port for 3 whole days, with no gambling whatsoever during that period. Also, Hawaiian law prohibits casino gambling on ships sailing round-trip from the state, so there's no casino on NCL's *Pride of America.* In Alaska, where ships sail mostly in the protected waters of the Inside Passage, a dispensation allows their casinos to stay open except when they're within 3 miles of a port.

Children are not permitted to enter onboard casinos; the minimum age is generally 18 or 21.

Disney's two ships lack casinos due to Disney's essentially puritan nature. Most of the small ships in chapter 8 lack casinos because their passengers are too busy looking for whales.

ART AUCTIONS

You'll find shipboard art auctions either a fun way to buy pictures for your living room or a **seriously dubious** and **blatantly tacky** way for the cruise lines to make more money by selling overpriced, marginally interesting, or just plain awful prints, lithographs, and animation cels to unsuspecting passengers—not that we're taking sides, of course. The auctions are big business on mainstream and ultraluxury lines, held three or four times a week in one of the ship's lounges, for an hour or two at a time. The auctioneer (a salesman for an outside company that arranges the shows) begins with a talk about the hundreds of pieces spread around the room, and usually seems (to us at least) to give the impression these are rare and important works of original art—which of course they're not. Generally they're **prints,** which is a fancy way of saying *copies.* Bid if you feel compelled, but we wouldn't. The one big plus about these auctions? **Free champagne**—and they'll keep bringing it whether you bid or not. Just sign up and look interested.

4 Keeping Fit: Gyms, Spas & Sports

Since the early 1990s, cruise lines have been making their spa and fitness areas bigger and more high tech, and these days they occupy prime top-deck positions with great views from floor-to-ceiling windows. The best of them—aboard the Celebrity, Royal Caribbean, Princess, Carnival, Norwegian, and Holland America ships—probably beat out your neighborhood gym, with dozens of state-of-the-art workout machines, large aerobics rooms, spinning and Pilates classes, and spa treatments from basic to bizarre. Sports areas are also getting supersize on some ships, and options you'd never have imagined possible on a ship just a few years ago, from spinning bikes to BOSU balls, are becoming commonplace.

GYMS: AN ANTIDOTE TO THE MIDNIGHT BUFFET

The well-equipped **fitness centers** on the megaships may feature 20 or more treadmills and just as many stationary bikes (many with virtual reality screens), step machines, upper- and lower-body machines, free weights, and aerobics rooms. Expect

great gym facilities on Royal Caribbean's Oasis-, Freedom-, Radiance-, and Voyager-class ships; Carnival's Conquest, Spirit, and Destiny classes; Princess's Grand and Coral classes; all of NCL's modern megaships; Holland America's Signature- and Vista-class ships; and Celebrity's Solstice and Millennium classes. Working out on your own is free, as are many basic aerobics and stretching classes, but if you want to take a trendier class such as boxing, spinning, Pilates, yoga, or tai chi, it'll usually cost you $10 or more. **Personal training sessions** are usually available for around $80 a pop. Royal Caribbean's Oasis- and Freedom-class ships, currently the biggest cruise ships on earth, have absolutely gigantic gyms, boasting everything from a full-size Everlast boxing ring to lots of trendy classes, machines, and training accouterments.

Gyms on the few older ships remaining in the American cruise market are generally smaller and more spartan, but you'll find at least a couple of treadmills, a stationary bike or step machine, and some free weights on all but the smallest, most adventure-oriented cruise lines. On ships with limited or no gym facilities, aerobics and stretching classes may be held out on deck or in a lounge.

ONBOARD SPORTS OPTIONS

If you're into sports, the megaships pack the most punch, with jogging tracks; outdoor volleyball, basketball, and paddle-tennis courts; plus several pools for water polo, volleyball, aqua aerobics, and swimming. The most mega of the megas—Royal Caribbean's enormous Oasis-, Freedom-, and Voyager-class ships—pack a bona fide ice-skating rink, an outdoor rock-climbing wall, an in-line skating track (on the Voyager ships), a surfing simulator (on the Oasis and Freedom ships), a full-size basketball court, miniature golf, and lots more. In addition to rock climbing, Royal's *Enchantment of the Seas* has a set of bungee trampolines, while the line's Radiance-class ships have gyro-balanced pool tables.

GOLF

In old movies, you always see the stars whacking golf balls off the backs of ships. You can't do that anymore—the environment, you know—but today's ships are catering to golfers in other ways, and more than ever before. While practically all the major cruise lines offer some level of golf instruction or excursions, several go the extra mile. For instance, **Carnival** (www.carnivalgolf.com), **Holland America** (www.hollandamericagolf.com), **Celebrity** (www.celebritycruisesgolf.com), **Princess** (www.princessgolf.com), and **Silversea** (www.silverseagolf.com) feature programs on all or some of their ships created by Florida's **Elite Golf Cruises** (www.elitegolfcruises.com), which offer comprehensive onboard golf academies with various combinations of instruction, guided golf excursions in almost every port of call, and pro-shop-style extras.

These lines have an onboard golf pro who schedules private, couple, or group **lessons.** The lessons typically include having your stroke analyzed via V1 digital video coaching, which uses a split screen to compare your stroke side-by-side with those of various golf legends—which could either be totally demoralizing or totally inspiring, depending on your frame of mind. A 1-hour private lesson is usually about $80 to $95. Many ships have driving nets or putting greens that are free for guests to use, and on sea days, demonstrations, clinics, and onboard putting contests are often held.

Many lines' ships, including Royal Caribbean, Princess, Celebrity, and SeaDream Yacht Club, have **computerized golf simulators** that allow virtual play mimicking some three dozen of the world's top courses, including Scotland's St. Andrews, North Carolina's Pinehurst, and California's Pebble Beach. The system analyzes every nuance

of a golfer's swing to give a perfect real-time simulation of the shot on a 10×12-foot screen. The hitting mat even simulates different fairway conditions, from light rough to sand. Minicompetitions are held on most sea days for all levels of players, from beginners to serious competitors. Prices for the simulators range from $25 to $50 per person, per 30- to 60-minute session. For those not so serious, **Royal Caribbean** has miniature golf courses on its Oasis-, Freedom-, Radiance- and Voyager-class ships (with minigolf also available on *Splendour* and *Legend of the Seas*), as does **Princess** on many of its ships, including the *Grand, Golden, Star, Coral, Island, Diamond, Sapphire, Caribbean,* and *Crown Princess.*

In port, just about every line provides **golf excursions,** with one cost including early debarkation, transportation, priority tee times, golf pro escort, cart rental, and greens fees. Clubs and golf shoes are available for demo, rental, or purchase if you don't want to lug your own. Some of the best courses in the world are included in the packages.

ONBOARD SPAS: TAKING RELAXATION ONE STEP FURTHER

If your idea of a heavenly vacation is stripping down to a towel and having someone rub mystery oil over your body, choose a cruise ship with a well-stocked spa—it won't be hard. For the past 15 years, spas have been big business on cruise ships, and have gotten progressively more amazing as the years pass. Most are perched on top decks and boast views from as many as 20 or so treatment rooms, where you can choose from dozens of massages, mud packs, facials, and even teeth whitening, acupuncture, and other esoteric treatments.

If you've taken a few cruises and noticed that the spas on different lines look suspiciously alike, that's because almost all of them (as well as the ships' salons) are staffed and operated by the London-based firm **Steiner Leisure.** NCL's spas are operated by a company called **Mandara,** but (surprise) it's owned by Steiner, too. Companies bucking the Steiner hegemony include Regent Seven Seas (whose spas are run by **Carita**), Cunard (whose *QM2* spa is run by **Canyon Ranch**), and SeaDream and Star Clipper, both of which have in-house spa operations.

The young, mostly female Steiner employees are professional and charming for the most part, but we've found their abilities to be inconsistent, with some definitely more talented than others. Overall, **massages** are a pretty safe bet, whether you choose a standard neck massage, a full-body shiatsu massage, or a deep-tissue sports massage (which can verge on painful but gives you the most bang, wallop, and burn for your buck). The highest profile massage today is the **hot stone massage,** in which the therapist rubs you down with heated river rocks and oil—think soothing rather than invigorating. Trendy treatments include teeth whitening and, yes, botox injections.

We've found other treatments often to be disappointing and not worth the money unless you live in a place where access to unusual spa and beauty treatments is limited. For the same 50 bucks you spend on a pedicure aboard ship, you could get two much better ones in New York, but if you live in, say, rural North Dakota? Well, it's your vacation, so live it up.

A word about some of the more exotic and expensive treatments, such as electrode facials and **Ionithermie** slimming/detox, which allegedly stimulates cells, releases toxins, and contributes directly to weight loss: Whenever we've asked for details, it's clear most spa staffers don't have a clue about them beyond the descriptions they've memorized. We suspect—and this is just our opinion, mind you—that's because they're a load of hooey.

Here's a sampling of treatments and their standard Steiner rates:

- 25-minute Swedish massage: $79 to $89
- 50-minute full-body massage: $109 to $145
- 75-minute hot stone massage: $175 to $215
- 50-minute facial: $109 to $175
- Manicure: $25 to $45
- Pedicure: $40 to $65
- 30-minute teeth-whitening session: about $200
- Botox injections: $300+

Note that rates for identical treatments can vary by as much as $20 or $30 from ship to ship. Treatments are charged to your onboard account. Usually they do not include a **gratuity,** but on a few lines Steiner does add it directly to your bill. Before you sign, ask your therapist or the desk attendant whether a tip is included, and write one in if not. Of course, if unhappy with your treatment, you're not required to tip at all.

It's almost guaranteed that at the end of your session, just as you're coming out of a semiconscious trance, your Steiner or Mandara therapist will give you an itemized list of expensive **creams, exfoliants, moisturizers, toners,** and **masks** that will help you get the spa effect at home—all for just a couple of hundred bucks. In fact, on a *Norwegian Dawn* cruise, co-author Heidi's massage therapist spent a whopping 15 minutes telling her how Gwyneth Paltrow and other stars swore by the $124 Elemis face cream she was pushing. Enough already. The products are often very good, but the sales pitch is just a little too shameless. So, remember our mantra: *You can say no*—unless, of course, you're in a spending mood. See "Best Ships for Spa-Goers," in the "The Best of Cruising" chapter near the beginning of this book, to find out which ships have the best facilities.

Tip: Make your spa appointments on the first day out to snag the best times.

5 Programs for Kids & Teens

With the cruise lines falling all over themselves to cater to kids these days, amenities and services for children rival those offered for adults. The cruise execs know that if the kiddos are happy, mom and dad will be too (and will hopefully want to book more cruises). Dedicated playrooms, camplike counselors (some who are wonderful, others morose and tired), computers, state-of-the-art video arcades, pools, and new teen centers have most kids so gaga for cruising, you'll have to drag them away kicking and screaming at the end of the week. Even if your kids are too young to join the programming (which typically starts at age 2 or 3), there are more options than ever. In this age of play dates, it's no surprise that a line, Royal Caribbean, has introduced daily 45-minute **play groups** for infants, toddlers, and parents.

The youngest kids frolic in toy- and game-stocked **playrooms,** listen to stories, go on treasure hunts, play dodge ball, and do arts and crafts; older kids keep busy with **computer games,** lip-sync competitions, pool games, volleyball, and now many more educational-oriented activities focused on art, science, music, and exercise. There's usually a TV showing movies throughout the day, and, for the younger ones, there might be ball bins and plastic jungle gyms to crawl around in. Many megaships have shallow kiddie pools for diaper-trained young'uns, sometimes sequestered on an isolated patch of deck.

The newest ships of the mainstream lines invite hard-to-please **teens** to hang out in their very own space, complete with a dance floor, bar (nonalcoholic, of course), video

wall for movie watching, video arcade, and sometimes their own Internet cafe. Some of the best facilities are found on the *Carnival Splendour, Freedom, Liberty, Valor, Glory,* and *Conquest; Disney Wonder* and *Magic;* Royal Caribbean's Oasis, Freedom, Voyager, and Radiance classes; *Norwegian Dawn, Star,* and *Spirit;* and the *Grand, Golden, Star,* and *Caribbean Princess.* Many ships are now offering spa treatments for teens and special kid-only shore excursions too.

See section 4, "Cruises for Families," in chapter 1, for more details, including information on **babysitting.**

6 Onboard Dining Options

Perhaps nothing has changed the cruise experience as much as the evolution of dining. When we started covering ships more than a decade ago, almost all served traditional five-course, assigned-seating dinners in formal dining rooms, with an optional buffet for breakfast and lunch and a grill out on deck. Now it's a free-for-all, with numerous **casual dining options** that allow passengers not only to dress down but also to dine with complete flexibility, choosing when, with whom, and where they want to eat. In mid-2000, **Norwegian Cruise Line** got the ball rolling with its Freestyle Cruising concept, which lets passengers dine anytime between 5:30pm and midnight in any of several venues, with the last seating at 10pm. **Azamara**'s and **Oceania**'s much smaller ships have essentially the same system, and **Princess** and **Holland America** allow passengers the option of choosing flexible or traditional dining.

Formal or casual aside, the bottom line is that cruise lines are willing to feed you till you pop, and these days are providing more cuisine options, too. On the megaships, you can get elegant **multicourse meals** served in grand two- and three-story dining rooms; make reservations at an intimate specialty restaurant for Asian, Italian, French, Tex-Mex, or Pacific Northwest cuisine; drop in at the ship's buffet restaurant or cafe for an ultracasual meal; take in some **24-hour pizza** or other late-night option; grab a **snack** (ice cream, cookies, pastries, or specialty coffees); and maybe have some **sushi** to top it all off. Carnival has pizza, Caesar salad, and garlic rolls 24 hours a day; many lines now deliver pizza to your cabin; and Royal Caribbean's Freedom- and Voyager-class ships have entire 1950s-style diners out on deck. The midsize ships generally have fewer choices, though Oceania's and Azamara's vessels, which carry only about 700 passengers apiece, have four different venues at dinner, including Mediterranean and steakhouse specialty restaurants and a casual option with table service.

All the cruise lines in this book will attempt to satisfy reasonable culinary requests, so if you follow a **special diet,** inform your line as early as possible (preferably when booking your cruise) to make sure it'll be able to satisfy your needs at all three meals. **Vegetarian dishes** and a selection of **healthier, lighter meals** (usually called "spa cuisine" or "light and healthy options") is available as a matter of course on just about every mainstream and luxury ship at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Some of the small-ship lines need advance notice for any special requests. Most large ships will provide kosher and halal meals if requested in advance, but expect them to be prepackaged.

TRADITIONAL DINING

Though casual and specialty dining are all the rage, most ships still continue to offer formal, **traditional dinners** in at least one restaurant, generally from about 6:30 to 10pm. Ships carrying fewer than 400 passengers generally have one **open-seating**

dinner, where guests can stroll in when they want and sit with whomever they choose. Those carrying more than 400 passengers typically have two **assigned seatings** in one or more main dining rooms. Princess has a combination of both, with one or more restaurants on each ship allowing open restaurant-style seating and another with traditional early and late seating. Disney puts a unique twist on things by having two seatings in three main themed dining rooms that passengers and their servers rotate through over the course of the cruise.

Most ships still require you to reserve either the early or late seating (sometimes called first and second seating) when booking your cruise. Elderly passengers and families with children tend to choose the **early seating** (served at around 6 or 6:30pm), though you have to be ready to leave the table once the dishes are cleared. If you choose **late seating** (served around 8 or 8:30pm), you won't have to rush through predinner showering and dressing after an active day in port, and the meal tends to be more leisurely, allowing you to linger over coffee and after-dinner drinks.

If you get assigned to the first seating and you want the second, or vice versa (or you get no assignment at all), see the maitre d' staff, which will probably have a table set up in the dining room during embarkation for this purpose. Most can accommodate your wishes, if not on the first night of sailing, then on the second. Ditto if you find that you don't get along with your assigned tablemates. Most of the time you'll be seated at a table with 4 to 10 people. If you want privacy, you can request a table for two, but unless you're sailing aboard one of the smaller, more upscale ships, don't get your hopes up, as couples' tables are usually few and far between.

Seven-night cruises with traditional dining generally have 2 **formal nights** per week, when the dress code in the main dining room may call for dark suits or tuxedos for men and cocktail dresses or fancy pantsuits for women. Other nights in the main dining rooms will probably be designated informal and/or casual. Ten- to 14-night cruises usually have three formal nights. (See section 4, "Packing for the Different Cruise Climates," in chapter 3, for more information.) If you want to skip formality altogether, most ships have casual dining in the buffet restaurant every evening and/or other casual alternative options (see below).

Though some ships still have early and late seatings for breakfast and lunch (served around 7 and 8:30am and noon and 1:30pm, respectively), most ships are now allowing open-seating setups within certain hours.

Smoking is prohibited in all ships' dining rooms, specialty restaurants, and other food-service venues—even within a certain distance of on-deck grills.

SPECIALTY DINING

Variety + intimacy = specialty dining. Over the past decade, all the mainstream lines and most of the luxe lines have retooled their ships' layouts to make room for more small, alternative dining venues, where 100 or so guests can sample various international cuisine with sometimes elaborate presentation. Of course, you often have to pay for that treat, with most specialty restaurants charging between $10 and $30 per person, per meal (except on the luxury lines, where there's no extra charge). Sometimes the food and service are exceptional and sometimes they aren't any better than in the main dining rooms, but the venues are at least quieter and more intimate. The best are on Celebrity, Crystal, Silversea, and Regent. NCL also gets special mention for having so damn many of them—six on the line's newest ships, plus casual choices.

See the "Dining Options" section of each ship review in chapters 6, 7, and 8 to learn who's got what.

CASUAL DINING

If you'd rather skip the formality and hubbub of the main dining room, all but the tiniest ships serve breakfast, lunch, and often dinner in a **casual, buffet-style restaurant.** Usually located on the pool deck, with indoor and outdoor seating, these restaurants serve a spread of both hot and cold items. On the megaships, a grill may be nearby, serving burgers, hot dogs, and often chicken and veggie burgers at lunch. Increasingly, you can also find specialty stations with taco fixings, deli sandwiches, pasta specialties, Chinese food, and more. On most ships, breakfast and lunch buffets are generally served for a 3- to 4-hour period, so guests can stroll in and out whenever they want; but many of the mainstream lines also keep portions of their buffets open almost round-the-clock. Most lines serve nightly buffet-style dinners here as well, some providing a combination of sit-down service and buffet.

BETWEEN-MEAL SNACKING

"Between-meal snacking" is the cruise industry's middle name. Almost all the megaships and midsize vessels have complimentary **pizzerias** (some open 24 hrs. a day) and **self-serve frozen yogurt and ice-cream machines,** as well as cafes or coffee shops where you can grab a snack, sandwich, or specialty coffee, the latter for an extra charge. The upscale lines and some of the mainstreamers (such as Azamara, Celebrity, Princess, Oceania, and Holland America) have **afternoon tea service,** serving finger sandwiches, pastries, and cookies along with tea and coffee. Carnival and several others do their own, less fancy versions. Most of the small-ship lines serve **pre-dinner snacks and hors d'oeuvres** on deck or in the main lounge or bar area.

The **midnight buffet,** a staple of cruising back in the '80s and '90s, has been scaled back in recent years from a daily thing to an occasional treat. Today, you'll usually find it served in all its overwhelming extravagance only once or twice a week on most lines, with heaps of elaborately decorated fruits, vegetables, pastries, cold cuts, pasta, and sometimes shrimp and other treats. Sometimes the nighttime feast will be focused on a culinary theme, such as Tex-Mex, Caribbean, or chocolate. Sometimes smaller **snack stations** will be set up instead, or servers will cruise the ships with trays of hors d'oeuvres—which keeps drinkers where the cruise lines want them: at the bar, running up tabs.

If you'd rather not leave your cabin, most ships provide **24-hour room service** with menus that vary from limited to lush. Passengers on luxury ships (and suite guests on all ships) can usually have the same meals being served in the dining room delivered to their suites course by course.

7 Onboard Entertainment

Entertainment is a big part of the cruise experience on almost all ships, but especially on the megaships of Carnival, Royal Caribbean, Celebrity, Costa, Princess, NCL, and Holland America, which all present an extensive variety throughout the day. We have noticed, though, the number of live musicians seems to be smaller of late, due to, we presume, lines cutting back to save money. Afternoons, you can dance on deck with the **live dance band** (which will likely be comprised of one or two musicians instead of four), which we'll bet 10-to-1 will be jamming calypso music or tunes by Bob Marley and Jimmy Buffett. Or put on your waltzing shoes and head inside to one of the

lounges for some **swing dancing.** Lines such as Holland America, Crystal, NCL, Cunard, Oceania, and Royal Caribbean often feature a 1940s-style big band playing dance tunes. Some of the most pleasant concerts we've heard at sea were aboard the Royal Caribbean Voyager ships. On one, a trio was so inspiring that two passengers joined in, belting out Italian opera songs like real pros. At another, the ship's big band set up just outside the pub, among the crowd, and played a relaxed set of standards.

Pre-dinner entertainment starts to heat up around 5pm, and continues all night to accommodate passengers dining early and late. Head to the **piano bar** for a cocktail or do some pre-dinner dancing to small-group jazz.

Usually two or three times in any weeklong cruise, there are apt to be **Vegas-style musical revues** performed early and late in the main show lounge, with a flamboyant troupe of anywhere from 6 to 16 feather-boa-and-sequin-clad male and female dancers sliding, kicking, and lip-synching as a soloist or two belt out show tunes and pop favorites; the latest trend includes a ballroom dance couple in the mix. Expect a lot of Andrew Lloyd Webber; "YMCA"; at least one tune each from *Grease, Footloose,* and *A Chorus Line;* and maybe a few Richard Rodgers tunes. A live orchestra accompanies most of these productions, though not all (and overall, orchestras seem smaller than they were in the past). While the quality of shows industrywide is inconsistent, opinion here at Casa Frommer's is divided on the whole revue format: Heidi enjoys the medleys "if the singing's good—which, granted, it isn't always," and Matt thinks most of them are "all flash and no substance." Two cruise lines we can agree on, though, are Disney and NCL. Disney has absolutely the best shows at sea, with characters and stories based on its parent company's classic films. Recent shows on NCL are also standouts, with strong soloists and really original staging, choreography, and choice of material.

On nights when the shows aren't scheduled, there may be a **magic show** complete with a scantily clad assistant being sawed in half and rabbits pulled from a hat; **acrobatic acts** and **aerialists** (always a big hit); **headline soloists,** some of them quite good (such as singer Jane L. Powell, a perennial NCL favorite whose amazing range takes her from Louis Armstrong to Bette Midler); and **guest comedians** or **specialty acts,** such as Costa's regular operatic recitals, Oceania's pianists, and Royal Caribbean's and Crystal's a cappella singing groups. **Comedians** frequently perform in the main theater or a second performance space, sometimes doing PG- and R-rated material at an early show and then running the X up the mast at an adults-only midnight performance (now, surprisingly, Carnival offers this). Raising the humor bar, Norwegian Cruise Line has hysterical shows by the famed Second City improv comedy group on *Dawn, Spirit, Star, Jewel, Pearl,* and *Gem.* On its new *Norwegian Epic* (launching after this book goes to press), NCL is even featuring a show by the **Blue Man Group.** Another not-yet-launched ship, Royal Caribbean's supersized *Oasis of the Sea,* will feature the Tony Award–winning musical *Hairspray* in her Opal Theater.

The **disco** gets going on most ships around 9 or 10pm and works it until 2 or 3am, sometimes later. Occasionally a live band plays until about midnight, when a DJ takes over until the wee hours, spinning tunes from the 1970s through the present; sometimes there's only a DJ. A **karaoke session** may also be thrown in for an hour or two in the afternoon or evening. Riding the coattails of the ballroom dance craze, some lines like Royal Caribbean and Regent Seven Seas are holding **ballroom dance performances** led by the entertainers and sometimes incorporating passengers who are especially talented.

An alternative to the disco or the main show may be a pianist or jazz trio in one of the ship's romantic nightspots, or a **themed party,** sometimes on deck—NCL, Royal Caribbean, and Disney especially excel at after-dinner parties on deck complete with special effects and funky lighting. For a quiet evening, many lines show **recent-release movies** in a theater, a dedicated cinema, or up on deck on a giant LED screen.

To prove not all innovative entertainment has to be big, Crystal has **strolling vocal quartets** roaming around its ships in the evening, performing wherever people are gathered. On Royal Caribbean's Freedom-class ships, a troupe of **clowns** performs impromptu juggling, acrobatic, and comedy routines in various public areas. At different points of the cruise, they also give juggling lessons and might give a little talk about technique. Big thumbs up! Along similar lines, Carnival also features acrobats in the atria from time to time to liven things up.

Ships carrying 100 to 400 passengers have fewer entertainment options and a more mellow evening ambience overall. The high-end lines may feature a quartet or pianist performing before dinner and maybe a small-scale song-and-dance revue afterward, plus dancing in a quiet lounge. The small adventure-oriented ships may at most have a solo performer before and after dinner, or **local musicians** and/or **dancers** aboard for an afternoon or evening.

8 Shopping Opportunities on Ship & Shore

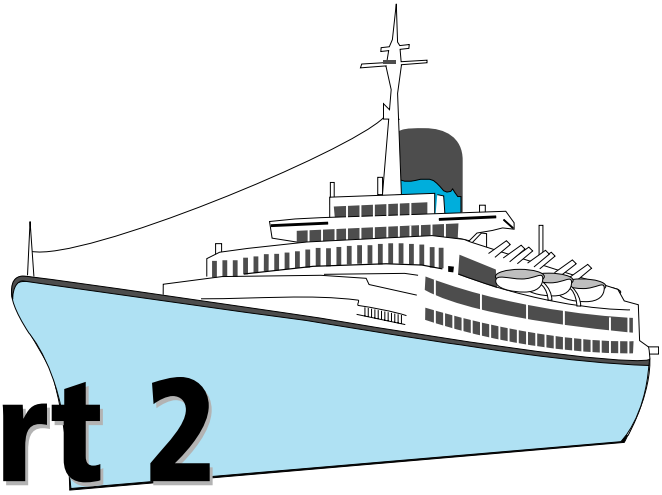
Even the smallest ships have at least a small shop on board selling T-shirts, sweatshirts, and baseball caps bearing the cruise line logo. The big new megaships, though, are like minimalls, with as many as 10 different stores selling items from toiletries and sundries to high-end china. In case you're in need, you'll usually find **formal wear** such as sequined dresses and jackets, silk dresses and scarves, purses, satin shoes, cummerbunds, ties, and tuxedo shirts, as well as perfume, cosmetics, and jewelry (costume and the real stuff). Don't expect huge bargains on most of it.

A few ships have **name-brand stores,** or sections of stores. The Silversea ships have H. Stern jewelry boutiques, for instance, while Cunard's *QM2* and *Queen Victoria* have a Harrods section in one of their shops selling lots of those cute stuffed bears, green totes, and biscuits. The high-end lines, and even many of the mass-market ones, have boutiques selling top-end jewelry; Crystal, for instance, sells $50,000 diamond-encrusted watches.

All merchandise sold on board while a ship is at sea is **tax-free** (though you must declare it at Customs when returning to the U.S.); to maintain that tax-free status, the shops are closed whenever a ship is in port. Prices can vary, though, and just like at a resort, items such as disposable cameras, sunscreen, candy, and snack foods will cost substantially more than you'd pay at home. On the other hand, by mid-cruise there are often decent sales on things like T-shirts, tote bags, jewelry, and booze.

Before each port of call, the cruise director or shore-excursion manager gives a **port talk** about that place's attractions and shopping. Now, it's no secret that many cruise lines have mutually beneficial deals with certain shops in every port (generally of the touristy chain variety), so on the big, mass-market ships especially, the vast majority of the port info disseminated will be about shopping. Better bring along your own guidebook (this one!) if you want information on history or culture. The cruise lines often recommend a list of shops in town where they say the merchandise is guaranteed; if a stone falls out of the new ring you bought at one of these shops when you get home,

the lines say they'll try to help you get a replacement. Don't hold your breath, though; the whole thing is a bit ambiguous. If you're not an expert on jewelry or whatever else you want to buy, it may be safer to shop at these stores than others; however, you won't get much taste for the local culture in them. Browsing at outdoor markets and in smaller craft shops is a better way to get an idea of the port's real flavor.



Part 2

The Cruise Lines & Their Ships

Detailed, in-depth reviews of all the cruise lines sailing from U.S. and Canadian home ports and a few Caribbean islands, with discussions of the type of experience they offer and the lowdown on all their ships.

5 The Ratings & How to Read Them

6 The Mainstream Lines

7 The Ultraluxury Lines

8 Small Ships, Sailing Ships & Adventure Cruises

5

The Ratings & How to Read Them

The following three chapters are the heart and soul of this book, our expert reviews and ratings of the cruise lines and ships operating in the American market. This chapter is your instruction manual, with hints on how to use the reviews to compare the lines and find the one that's right for you.

1 Cruise Line Categories

To make your selection easier (and to make sure you're not comparing apples and oranges), we've divided the cruise lines into three distinct categories, given each category a chapter of its own, and rated each line only in comparison with the other lines in its category (see more about this in "How to Read the Ratings," below). The categories are as follows:

THE MAINSTREAM LINES (chapter 6) This category includes the most prominent players in the industry, the jack-of-all-trades lines with the biggest ships, carrying the most passengers, and providing the most diverse cruise experiences to suit many different tastes, from party-hearty to elegant and refined. With all the competition in the industry today, these lines tend to offer good prices, too.

THE ULTRALUXURY LINES (chapter 7) These are the Dom Perignon of cruises, providing elegant, refined, and doting service, extraordinary dining, spacious cabins, and high-toned entertainment aboard intimate, finely appointed small and midsize vessels—and at a high price.

SMALL SHIPS, SAILING SHIPS & ADVENTURE CRUISES (chapter 8) If you don't like crowds; want an experience that revolves around nature, history, or culture; want to visit out-of-the-way ports; and/or prefer quiet conversation to a large ship's constant activity, these small, casual ships may be your cup of tea.

2 Reading the Reviews & Ratings

Each cruise line's review begins with **The Line in a Nutshell** (a quick word about the line in general) and **The Experience,** which is just what it says: a short summation of the kind of cruise experience you can expect to have aboard that line, followed by a few major **pros and cons.** The **Ratings Table** judges the individual elements of the line's cruise experience compared with the other lines in the same category (see below for ratings details). The text that follows fleshes out these summations, providing all the details you need to get a feel for what kind of vacation the cruise line will give you.

The individual **ship reviews** give you details on each vessel's physical characteristics: accommodations, facilities, amenities, comfort level, upkeep, and vital statistics (size, passenger capacity, year launched and most recently refurbished, number of cabins, number of crew, and so on). Size is described in terms of **gross register tonnage (GRT),** which is a measure not of actual weight, but of the interior space (or volume) used to produce revenue on a ship: 1 GRT equals 100 cubic feet of enclosed, revenue-generating space. By dividing the GRTs by the number of passengers aboard, we arrive at the **passenger/space ratio,** which gives you some idea of how much elbowroom you'll have on each ship. To compare the amount of personalized service you can expect, we have the **passenger/crew ratio,** which tells you approximately how many passengers each crewmember is expected to serve—though this doesn't literally mean a waiter for every two or three passengers, because "crew" includes everyone from officers to deckhands to shop clerks.

Note that when several vessels are members of a class—built on the same design, with usually only minor variations in decor and attractions—we've grouped the ships together into one **class review.**

HOW TO READ THE RATINGS

To make things easier on everyone, we've developed a simple ratings system based on the classic customer-satisfaction survey, rating both the cruise line as a whole and the individual ships as *poor, fair, good, excellent,* or *outstanding* on a number of important qualities. The **cruise line ratings** cover all the elements that are usually consistent from ship to ship within the line (overall enjoyability of the experience, quality of the dining experience, activities, children's program, entertainment, service, and value), while the **individual ship ratings** cover those things that vary from vessel to vessel—quality and size of the cabins and public spaces, comfort, appearance and upkeep, decor, number and attractiveness of dining options, gyms/spas (or, for the small-adventure lines that don't have gyms and spas, "Adventure & Fitness Options"), and children's facilities—plus a rating for the overall enjoyability of the onboard experience. To provide an **overall score,** we've given each ship a star rating (for example, ★★★½) based on the combined total of our poor-to-outstanding ratings, translated into a 1-to-5 scale:

1	**=**	**Poor**	**4**	**=**	**Excellent**
2	**=**	**Fair**	**5**	**=**	**Outstanding**
3	**=**	**Good**			

In instances where the category doesn't apply to a particular ship (for example, none of the adventure ships has children's facilities), we've simply noted "not applicable" (N/A) and absented the category from the total combined score, as these unavailable amenities usually are not what people are looking for in that type of ship anyway.

Now for a bit of philosophy: The cruise biz today offers a profusion of experiences so different that comparing all lines and ships by the same set of criteria would be like comparing a luxury Manhattan hotel to a rural B&B. That's why, to rate the cruise lines and their ships, we grade on a curve that compares them only with others in their category—mainstream with mainstream, luxe with luxe, adventure with adventure. Once you've determined what kind of experience is right for you, look for the best ships in that category based on your particular needs. For example, if you see in the "Small Ships, Sailing Ships & Adventure Cruises" chapter that Windstar achieves an "outstanding" rating for dining, it means among the lines in that category/chapter,

Windstar has the best cuisine. It may not be up to the level of, say, the ultraluxurious Silversea (it's not), but if you're looking for a sailing-ship cruise that also has terrific food, this line would be a great bet.

3 Evaluating & Comparing the Listed Cruise Prices

As we explain in detail in chapter 2, the cruise lines' brochure prices are almost always wildly inflated—they're the "sticker prices" cruise line execs would love to get in an ideal world. In reality, passengers typically pay anywhere from 10% to 50% less. Instead of publishing these inflated brochure rates, then, we've worked with Nashville's **Just Cruisin' Plus** (✆ **800/888-0922;** www.justcruisinplus.com) to provide you with samples of the **actual prices** customers were paying at press time. Other travel agencies and online sites will generally offer similar rates. Each ship review includes per diem prices (the total cruise price divided by the number of days) for the following three basic types of accommodations:

- Lowest-priced inside (without windows) cabin
- Lowest-priced outside (with windows) cabin
- Lowest-priced suite

Remember that cruise ships generally have several categories of cabins within each of these three basic divisions, all priced differently, and that the prices we've listed represent the *lowest* categories for inside and outside cabins and suites. Remember, too, that because this book covers cruises in several different regions, the prices listed are not applicable to all sailings—cruises in Alaska and Hawaii, for instance, are almost always more expensive than comparable cruises in the Caribbean. These prices are meant as a guide only and are in no way etched in stone—the price you pay may be higher or even lower, depending on when you choose to travel, when you book, what specials the lines are offering, and a slew of other factors. Prices listed include **port charges** (the per-passenger fee ports charge for ships to dock), but do not include taxes.

A NOTE ON ITINERARIES

Our fleet itinerary tables give an idea of which ships sail in which regions, and when. See the cruise lines' websites or a travel agent for full details on each itinerary. Note that we have not listed itineraries outside the geographical range of this book.

Ships at a Glance

Cruise Line	Ship	Frommer's Star Rating	Year Built
ACCL (sm. ship): A family-owned New England line operating tiny, no-frills ships that travel to offbeat places, carrying casual, down-to-earth, older passengers.	**Grande Caribe**	★★★	1997
	Grande Mariner	★★★	1998
	Niagara Prince	★★★	1994
American Cruise Lines (sm. ship): Part cruise, part Rotary Club meeting, part historical tour, this Connecticut-based line offers a comfortable, reserved, and hassle-free cruise experience.	**American Eagle**	★★★½	2000
	American Glory	★★★½	2002
	American Spirit	★★★½	2005
	American Star	★★★½	2007
American Safari Cruises (sm. ship): The most luxurious of the small-ship soft-adventure lines.	**Safari Explorer**	★★★★	1998
	Safari Quest	★★★★	1992
	Safari Spirit	★★★★	1981
Azamara (mainstream): Comfy exploration, country-club comfort.	**Azamara Journey**	★★★★	2000
Carnival (mainstream): When you're hankering for an utterly unpretentious and totally laid-back cruise, Carnival's colorful, jumbo-size resort ships deliver plenty of bang for the buck. If you like the flash of Vegas and a serious party vibe, you'll love Carnival's brand of flamboyant fun.	**Carnival Conquest**	★★★★½	2002
	Carnival Destiny	★★★★½	1996
	Carnival Ecstasy	★★★½	1991
	Carnival Elation	★★★½	1998
	Carnival Fantasy	★★★½	1990
	Carnival Fascination	★★★½	1994
	Carnival Freedom	★★★★½	2007
	Carnival Glory	★★★★½	2003
	Carnival Imagination	★★★½	1995
	Carnival Inspiration	★★★½	1996
	Carnival Legend	★★★★	2002
	Carnival Liberty	★★★★½	2005
	Carnival Miracle	★★★★	2004

Gross Tonnage	Passenger Capacity (Double Occupancy)	Passenger/Space Ratio	Passenger/Crew Ratio	Wheelchair Access	Sailing Regions	Full Review on Page
99•	100	N/A•	5.5 to 1	no	Caribbean/Central America, Bahamas, Atlantic Coast, Canada/New England	317
99•	100	N/A•	5.5 to 1	no	Great Lakes, Canada/ New England	317
99•	84	N/A•	5 to 1	no	Middle America, Great Lakes, Canada/New England	317
86•	49	N/A•	2.7 to 1	yes	Chesapeake Bay, Mid-Atlantic	322
86•	49	N/A•	2.7 to 1	yes	Antebellum South, Mid-Atlantic, Chesapeake Bay, New England	322
97•	100	N/A•	3.8 to 1	yes	Antebellum South, Mid-Atlantic, Chesapeake Bay, New England, Philadelphia & the Potomac	322
97•	100	N/A•	3.8 to 1	yes	Antebellum South, Mid-Atlantic, Chesapeake Bay, New England	322
N/A•	36	N/A•	2.25 to 1	no	Rivers of the West, Washington Wine Country, Alaska	324
99•	22	N/A•	2 to 1	no	Alaska	324
N/A•	12	N/A•	1.7 to 1	no	Sea of Cortez/Baja, Alaska, Pacific Northwest/B.C.	324
30,277	710	42.6	1.8 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Panama Canal	98
110,000	2,974	37	2.5 to 1	yes	Caribbean	110
101,353	2,642	38.4	2.6 to 1	yes	Caribbean	118
70,367	2,040	34.5	2.2 to 1	yes	Caribbean	121
70,367	2,040	34.5	2.2 to 1	yes	U.S. West Coast	121
70,367	2,040	34.5	2.2 to 1	yes	Caribbean	121
70,367	2,040	34.5	2.2 to 1	yes	Bahamas	121
110,000	2,974	37	2.5 to 1	yes	Caribbean	110
110,000	2,974	37	2.5 to 1	yes	Caribbean	110
70,367	2,040	34.5	2.2 to 1	yes	Bahamas, Caribbean	121
70,367	2,040	34.5	2.2 to 1	yes	Caribbean	121
88,500	2,124	41.7	2.3 to 1	yes	Caribbean	115
110,000	2,974	37	2.5 to 1	yes	Caribbean	110
88,500	2,124	41.7	2.3 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Bermuda	115

Ships at a Glance (continued)

Cruise Line	Ship	Frommer's Star Rating	Year Built
Carnival *(continued)*	**Carnival Paradise**	★★★½	1998
	Carnival Pride	★★★★	2001
	Carnival Sensation	★★★½	1993
	Carnival Spirit	★★★★	2001
	Carnival Splendor	★★★★½	2008
	Carnival Triumph	★★★★½	1999
	Carnival Valor	★★★★½	2004
	Carnival Victory	★★★★½	2000
Celebrity (mainstream): Celebrity offers an elegant and refined cruise experience, yet one that's fun, active, and doesn't cost a bundle. Each ship is spacious, glamorous, and comfortable, mixing sleekly modern and Art Deco styles and throwing in cutting-edge art collections to boot.	**Celebrity Century**	★★★★½	1995
	Celebrity Constellation	★★★★★	2002
	Celebrity Eclipse	Not yet rated	2010
	Celebrity Equinox	★★★★★	2009
	Celebrity Infinity	★★★★★	2001
	Celebrity Mercury	★★★★½	1997
	Celebrity Millennium	★★★★★	2000
	Celebrity Solstice	★★★★★	2008
	Celebrity Summit	★★★★★	2001
Costa (mainstream): Fun, festive, international megaships.	**Costa Atlantica**	★★★½	2000
	Costa Fortuna	★★★★	2003
Cruise West (sm. ship): Family-owned Cruise West is the preeminent small-ship line in Alaska, and over the past decade it's branched out to include trips in warmer destinations, too. Most of its itineraries are port-to-port and geared to older, well-traveled, intellectually curious passengers.	**Pacific Explorer**	★★★½	1995
	Spirit of Alaska	★★★½	1980
	Spirit of Columbia	★★★½	1979
	Spirit of Discovery	★★★½	1976
	Spirit of Endeavour	★★★½	1983
	Spirit of Glacier Bay	★★★½	1984
	Spirit of '98	★★★★	1984
	Spirit of Oceanus	★★★★★	1991
	Spirit of Yorktown	★★★½	1988

Gross Tonnage	Passenger Capacity (Double Occupancy)	Passenger/Space Ratio	Passenger/Crew Ratio	Wheelchair Access	Sailing Regions	Full Review on Page
70,367	2,040	34.5	2.2 to 1	yes	West Coast/Mexico	121
88,500	2,124	41.7	2.3 to 1	yes	Bahamas	115
70,367	2,040	34.5	2.2 to 1	yes	Bahamas	121
88,500	2,124	41.7	2.3 to 1	yes	Mexican Riviera, Hawaii, Alaska, Sea of Cortez/Baja	115
113,000	3,006	37.7	2.6 to 1	yes	Mexican Riviera	110
102,000	2,758	37	2.6 to 1	yes	Caribbean	118
110,000	2,974	37	2.5 to 1	yes	Caribbean	110
102,000	2,758	37	2.6 to 1	yes	Caribbean	118
70,606	1,750	41	2 to 1	yes	Bahamas, Caribbean	137
91,000	1,950	46.7	2 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Panama Canal	134
122,000	2,850	42.8	2.3 to 1	yes	Caribbean	130
122,000	2,850	42.8	2.3 to 1	yes	Caribbean	130
91,000	1,950	46.7	2 to 1	yes	Panama Canal, Alaska	134
77,713	1,896	41	2 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Bahamas, Alaska, Panama Canal	137
91,000	1,950	46.7	2 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Panama Canal, Alaska, U.S. West Coast/B.C.	134
122,000	2,850	42.8	2.3 to 1	yes	Caribbean	130
91,000	1,950	46.7	2 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Bermuda, Canada/New England	134
85,000	2,114	40	2.3 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Canada/ New England	146
105,000	2,720	38.6	2.5 to 1	yes	Caribbean	144
1,716	100	17	3 to 1	no	Panama/Costa Rica	331
97•	78	N/A	3.7 to 1	no	N/A	334
97•	78	N/A	3.7 to 1	no	Alaska	334
94•	84	N/A	4 to 1	no	Alaska, Columbia/ Snake Rivers	334
1,471	102	14.4	3.6 to 1	no	Alaska, B.C./San Juan Islands, Sea of Cortez/Baja	332
1,471	102	14.7	3.2 to 1	no	N/A	332
96•	96	N/A	4.2 to 1	partial	Columbia/Snake Rivers	330
4,500	114	39.5	2 to 1	partial	Atlantic Coast	329
2,354	138	17	3.5 to 1	no	Alaska	332

Ships at a Glance (continued)

Cruise Line	Ship	Frommer's Star Rating	Year Built
Crystal (luxury): Fine-tuned and fashionable, with pampering service, scrumptious cuisine, and ships large enough to offer generous fitness and entertainment facilities.	**Crystal Serenity**	★★★★½	2003
	Crystal Symphony	★★★★½	1995
Cunard (mainstream): A legendary line with a nearly legendary vessel—the largest ocean liner in the world.	**Queen Mary 2**	★★★★★	2003
Disney (mainstream): Family ships where both kids and adults are catered to equally, and with style.	**Disney Magic**	★★★★½	1998
	Disney Wonder	★★★★½	1999
Holland America (mainstream): Holland America has been in business since 1873, and has managed to hang on to more of its seafaring history and tradition than any line today, except Cunard. It offers a moderately priced, classic, and casual yet refined cruise experience.	**Amsterdam**	★★★★½	2000
	Eurodam	★★★★½	2008
	Maasdam	★★★★	1993
	Noordam	★★★★	2006
	Oosterdam	★★★★	2003
	Rotterdam	★★★★½	1997
	Ryndam	★★★★	1994
	Statendam	★★★★	1993
	Veendam	★★★★	1996
	Volendam	★★★★½	1999
	Westerdam	★★★★	2004
	Zaandam	★★★★½	2000
	Zuiderdam	★★★★	2002
Lindblad Expeditions (sm. ship): One of the most adventure-oriented small-ship lines, concentrating on wilderness and wildlife.	**National Geographic Sea Bird**	★★★½	1982
	National Geographic Sea Lion	★★★½	1981

Gross Tonnage	Passenger Capacity (Double Occupancy)	Passenger/Space Ratio	Passenger/Crew Ratio	Wheelchair Access	Sailing Regions	Full Review on Page
68,870	1,070	64.4	1.6 to 1	yes	Caribbean	274
51,044	922	55.4	1.7 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Panama Canal, Canada/New England, Hawaii	277
151,400	2,592	58.4	2.1 to 1	yes	Transatlantic, Caribbean, Canada/New England	154
83,000	1,754	47.3	1.8 to 1	yes	Caribbean	165
83,000	1,754	47.3	1.8 to 1	yes	Bahamas, Caribbean	165
61,000	1,380	44.2	2.1 to 1	yes	U.S. West Coast/B.C., Alaska, Mexican Riviera	182
86,700	2,104	41.2	2.3 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Canada/ New England, Atlantic Coast	175
55,451	1,266	43.8	2.1 to 1	yes	Panama Canal, Caribbean, Atlantic Coast, Canada/ New England	188
85,000	1,848	46	2.3 to 1	yes	Caribbean	179
85,000	1,848	46	2.3 to 1	yes	Mexican Riviera, Sea of Cortez/Baja, U.S. West Coast/ B.C., Alaska	179
56,652	1,316	43	2.2 to 1	yes	U.S. West Coast/B.C., Alaska	182
55,451	1,266	43.8	2.1 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Panama Canal, U.S. West Coast/B.C., Alaska	188
55,451	1,266	43.8	2.1 to 1	yes	Panama Canal, Caribbean, U.S. West Coast/B.C., Alaska	188
55,451	1,266	43.8	2.1 to 1	yes	Bermuda	188
63,000	1,440	43.8	2.2 to 1	yes	Alaska, U.S. West Coast/B.C.	185
85,000	1,848	46	2.3 to 1	yes	Caribbean	179
63,000	1,440	43.8	2.2 to 1	yes	Hawaii, Sea of Cortez/Baja, U.S. West Coast/B.C., Alaska	185
85,000	1,848	46	2.3 to 1	yes	Panama Canal, U.S. West Coast/B.C., Alaska	179
100•	62	N/A	2.6 to 1	no	Alaska, Sea of Cortez	338
100•	62	N/A	2.6 to 1	no	Alaska, Sea of Cortez, Central America	338

Ships at a Glance (continued)

Cruise Line	Ship	Frommer's Star Rating	Year Built
MSC Cruises (mainstream): Italian line offers midsize ships and gadget-free fun.	**MSC Magnifica**	Not yet rated	2009
	MSC Poesia	★★★★½	2007
Norwegian (mainstream): NCL may be the most mainstream of the mainstream lines these days—and we mean that in a good way, hewing to the center with always-casual dining (and lots of it); bright, cheerful decor; and fun innovations like gourmet beer bars and onboard bowling alleys. Its newest ships are real standouts, and it's the go-to line for Hawaii cruises.	**Norwegian Dawn**	★★★★½	2002
	Norwegian Epic	Not yet rated	2010
	Norwegian Gem	★★★★★	2007
	Norwegian Jewel	★★★★★	2005
	Norwegian Pearl	★★★★★	2006
	Norwegian Sky	★★★★	1999
	Norwegian Spirit	★★★★½	1999
	Norwegian Star	★★★★½	2002
	Norwegian Sun	★★★★	2001
	Pride of America	★★★★	2005
Oceania (mainstream): Casual premium line.	**Marina**	Not yet rated	2010
	Regatta	★★★★	1998
Princess (mainstream): With a fleet of mostly large and extralarge megaships, including some of the biggest at sea, L.A.-based Princess offers a quality mainstream cruise experience with a nice balance of tradition and innovation, relaxation and excitement, casualness and glamour.	**Caribbean Princess**	★★★★½	2004
	Coral Princess	★★★★½	2003
	Crown Princess	★★★★½	2006
	Dawn Princess	★★★★	1997
	Diamond Princess	★★★★½	2004
	Emerald Princess	★★★★½	2007
	Golden Princess	★★★★½	2001
	Grand Princess	★★★★½	1998
	Island Princess	★★★★½	2003
	Pacific Princess	★★★★	1999

Gross Tonnage	Passenger Capacity (Double Occupancy)	Passenger/Space Ratio	Passenger/Crew Ratio	Wheelchair Access	Sailing Regions	Full Review on Page
89,600	2,550	35.1	2.6 to 1	yes	Canada/New England	195
89,600	2,550	35	2.6 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Bermuda	195
92,250	2,224	41.5	2 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Bermuda, Canada/New England	205
150,000	4,200	35.7	N/A	yes	Caribbean	200
93,000	2,380	39	2 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Bahamas/Florida	205
93,502	2,376	39.4	2 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Canada/New England, Bahamas/Florida	205
93,530	2,394	39	2 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Panama Canal, U.S. West Coast/B.C., Alaska	205
77,104	2,002	38.5	2 to 1	yes	Bahamas	211
76,800	1,966	39.1	2 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Bermuda, Canada/New England	205
91,000	2,240	41.5	2 to 1	yes	Panama Canal, Mexican Riviera, U.S. West Coast/ B.C., Alaska	205
78,509	1,936	40.6	2 to 1	yes	U.S. West Coast/B.C., Alaska, Panama Canal, Caribbean	211
81,000	2,146	37.7	2.1 to 1	yes	Hawaii	209
65,000	1,258	51.7	1.6 to 1	yes	N/A	216
30,200	684	44.5	1.7 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Panama Canal, Mexican Riviera	219
113,000	3,100	36.5	2.6 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Bermuda, Canada/ New England	229
91,627	1,970	46.5	2 to 1	yes	Panama Canal, U.S. West Coast/B.C., Alaska	236
113,000	3,070	36.8	2.6 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Canada/New England, Atlantic Coast	229
77,000	1,950	39.5	2.2 to 1	yes	N/A	239
116,000	2,670	43.4	2.4 to 1	yes	Alaska	232
113,000	3,070	36.8	2.6 to 1	yes	Caribbean	229
109,000	2,600	41.9	2.4 to 1	yes	Hawaii, U.S. West Coast/ B.C., Alaska	229
109,000	2,600	41.9	2.4 to 1	yes	Caribbean	229
91,627	1,970	46.5	2 to 1	yes	Panama Canal, U.S. West Coast/B.C., Alaska	236
30,277	670	45.2	1.8 to 1	yes	N/A	241

Ships at a Glance (continued)

Cruise Line	Ship	Frommer's Star Rating	Year Built
Princess *(continued)*	**Royal Princess**	★★★★	2001
	Ruby Princess	★★★★½	2008
	Sapphire Princess	★★★★½	2004
	Sea Princess	★★★★	1998
	Star Princess	★★★★½	2002
	Sun Princess	★★★★	1995
Regent Seven Seas (luxury): Formerly known as Radisson Seven Seas, this line carries passengers in style and extreme comfort. Its brand of cruising is casually elegant and subtle, and its cuisine is near the top.	**Seven Seas Mariner**	★★★★½	2001
	Seven Seas Navigator	★★★★	1999
	Seven Seas Voyager	½	2003
Royal Caribbean (mainstream): Royal Caribbean offers some of the best-looking, best-designed, most activity-packed, and just plain fun megaships in the biz. Along with NCL, they're also at the forefront of innovation, always challenging the status quo regarding what can and can't be done aboard ships.	**Adventure of the Seas**	★★★½	2001
	Allure of the Seas	Not yet rated	2010
	Brilliance of the Seas	★★★★½	2002
	Enchantment of the Seas	★★½	1997
	Explorer of the Seas	★★★½	2000
	Freedom of the Seas	★★★½	2006
	Grandeur of the Seas	★★½	1996
	Independence of the Seas	★★★★½	2008
	Jewel of the Seas	★★★★½	2004
	Legend of the Seas	★★½	1995
	Liberty of the Seas	★★★½	2007
	Majesty of the Seas	★★★	1992
	Mariner of the Seas	★★★★½	2003
	Monarch of the Seas	★★★	1991
	Navigator of the Seas	★★★★½	2002
	Oasis of the Seas	Not yet rated	2009
	Radiance of the Seas	★★★★½	2001

	Gross Tonnage	Passenger Capacity (Double Occupancy)	Passenger/Space Ratio	Passenger/Crew Ratio	Wheelchair Access	Sailing Regions	Full Review on Page
	30,200	710	42.5	1.8 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Panama Canal, U.S. West Coast/B.C., Alaska, Hawaii	241
	113,000	3,070	36.8	2.6 to 1	yes	Caribbean	229
	116,000	2,670	43.4	2.4 to 1	yes	Mexican Riviera, U.S. West Coast/B.C., Alaska	232
	77,000	1,950	39.5	2.2 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Panama Canal, Alaska, Mexican Riviera	239
	109,000	2,600	41.9	2.4 to 1	yes	Caribbean	229
	77,000	1,950	39.5	2.2 to 1	yes	N/A	239
	50,000	700	71.4	1.6 to 1	yes	N/A	284
	33,000	490	67.3	1.5 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Panama Canal, Alaska	286
	46,000	700	65.7	1.6 to 1	yes	Atlantic Coast, Caribbean, Panama Canal	284
	142,000	3,114	45.6	2.7 to 1	yes	Caribbean	256
	220,000	5,400	40.7	2.5 to 1	yes	Caribbean	248
	90,090	2,100	43	2.5 to 1	yes	N/A	260
	80,700	2,252	35.8	2.7 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Bermuda, Canada/ New England, Bahamas	262
	142,000	3,114	45.6	2.7 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Bermuda, Bermuda/ Bahamas, Bermuda/Caribbean, Canada/New England	256
	160,000	3,634	44	2.7 to 1	yes	Caribbean	252
	74,140	1,950	38	2.5 to 1	yes	Caribbean	262
	160,000	3,634	44	2.7 to 1	yes	Caribbean	252
	90,090	2,100	42.9	2.5 to 1	yes	Caribbean & Panama, Canada/New England, Caribbean	259
	69,130	1,804	38.3	2.5 to 1	yes	N/A	262
	160,000	3,634	44	2.7 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Bahamas	252
	73,941	2,390	30.9	2.9 to 1	yes	Bahamas	265
	142,000	3,114	45.6	2.7 to 1	yes	Mexican Riviera	256
	73,941	2,390	30.9	2.9 to 1	yes	Bahamas	265
	142,000	3,114	45.6	2.7 to 1	yes	Caribbean	256
	220,000	5,400	40.7	2.5 to 1	yes	Caribbean	248
	90,090	2,100	42.9	2.5 to 1	yes	Mexican Riviera, Alaska, Panama Canal, Caribbean	259

Ships at a Glance (continued)

Cruise Line	Ship	Frommer's Star Rating	Year Built
Royal Caribbean *(continued)*	**Rhapsody of the Seas**	★★★½	1997
	Serenade of the Seas	★★★★½	2003
	Splendour of the Seas	★★★½	1996
	Vision of the Seas	★★★½	1998
	Voyager of the Seas	★★★★½	1999
Seabourn (luxury): Seabourn's ships are floating pleasure palaces, giving passengers doting service and some of the finest cuisine at sea.	**Seabourn Legend**	★★★★	1992
	Seabourn Odyssey	★★★★★	2009
	Seabourn Sojourn	★★★★★	2010
	Seabourn Spirit	★★★★	1989
Sea Cloud Cruises (sailing ships): Classic luxe.	**Sea Cloud**	★★★★★	1931
	Sea Cloud II	★★★★★	2001
SeaDream (luxury): An upscale yet casual line without the traditional regimentation.	**SeaDream I**	★★★★½	1984
	SeaDream II	★★★★½	1985
Silversea (luxury): Silversea caters to guests who won't settle for anything but the best, with free-flowing champagne and exceptional service.	**Silver Cloud**	★★★★½	1994
	Silver Shadow	★★★★★	2000
	Silver Spirit	Not yet rated	2009
	Silver Whisper	★★★★★	2001
Star Clippers (sailing ships): Classic clipper ships with all the amenities.	**Royal Clipper**	★★★★	2000
Windstar (sailing ships): The no-jackets-required policy aboard Windstar sums up the line's casually elegant attitude. The ships feel like private yachts—they're down to earth, yet service and cuisine are first class.	**Wind Spirit**	★★★½	1988
	Wind Star	★★★½	1986
	Wind Surf	★★★★	1990

• *Tonnage figures for small ships are often calculated differently than those of larger ships, making comparisons and passenger/space figures difficult to gauge.*

Gross Tonnage	Passenger Capacity (Double Occupancy)	Passenger/Space Ratio	Passenger/Crew Ratio	Wheelchair Access	Sailing Regions	Full Review on Page
78,491	2,000	39.2	2.5 to 1	yes	Alaska, Hawaii	262
90,090	2,100	42.9	2.5 to 1	yes	Caribbean	259
69,130	1,804	38.3	2.5 to 1	yes	N/A	262
78,491	2,000	39.2	2.5 to 1	yes	N/A	262
142,000	3,114	45.6	2.7 to 1	yes	Caribbean	256
10,000	208	48.1	1.5 to 1	yes	Central America, Caribbean	295
32,000	450	71.1	1.3 to 1	yes	Panama Canal, Caribbean	292
32,000	450	71.1	1.3 to 1	yes	Caribbean	291
10,000	208	48.1	1.5 to 1	yes	N/A	295
2,532	64	39.6	1 to 1	no	Caribbean	350
3,849	94	41	1.6 to 1	no	Caribbean	350
4,260	110	38.7	1.2 to 1	no	Caribbean	303
4,260	110	38.7	1.2 to 1	no	Caribbean	303
16,800	296	56.8	1.4 to 1	yes	Caribbean	313
28,258	382	74	1.3 to 1	yes	Panama Canal, Hawaii/ Polynesia, Caribbean, Alaska	311
36,000	540	66.7	1.4 to 1	yes	Caribbean, Mexican Riviera, Panama Canal	308
28,258	382	74	1.3 to 1	yes	Canada/NE, Bermuda, Caribbean	311
5,000	227	22	2.2 to 1	no	Caribbean	356
5,350	148	36	1.6 to 1	no	Caribbean	365
5,350	148	36	1.6 to 1	no	Central America, Panama Canal	365
14,745	312	47.3	1.6 to 1	no	Caribbean	363

6

The Mainstream Lines

These are the cruise lines you know even if you've never set foot on one (yet)—the ones with the catchy TV ads and glossy magazine spreads that make cruises seem like sheer paradise. For many people, they really are.

Today's mainstream ships are part theme park, part shopping mall, part gym, and part faux downtown entertainment and dining district, all packaged in a sleek hull with an oceanview resort perched on top. The biggest are *really* big: 14 stories tall, 1,000 feet long, with cabin space for between 2,000 and 5,000-plus passengers and a couple thousand crew. Most of the mainstream lines have spent the past 10 years pumping billions into ever-newer, bigger, and fancier ships, and the intense competition means they're constantly trying to outdo each other with entertainment and activities. The newer the ship, the more whoopee you can expect: ice-skating rinks, bowling alleys, water parks, outdoor movie theaters, pottery studios, surfing machines, giant spas, rock-climbing walls, full-size basketball courts, and virtual-reality golf, plus classics like hot tubs, theaters, water slides, and bars, bars, bars. The action is just outside your cabin door, though if you crave some downtime, there's always your private balcony or some quiet lounge that's deserted while everybody else is at the pool.

On days at sea, you can choose from a dizzying number of things to do, from dancing lessons, bingo, and game-show contests to lectures on finance and nutrition (and even classes on photography and website design on the high-end lines), and wine tastings. Mixers encourage singles to mingle and grandmothers to pull out the grandkid pictures, while contests at the pool encourage passengers to toss away all restraint as they try and stuff the most Ping-Pong balls down their bathing suits or flaunt their hairy chests (the men, of course). Overall the atmosphere is very social and active, especially on warm-weather cruises in the Caribbean, The Bahamas, Bermuda, and Mexico, which tend to draw the youngest mix of fun-loving, like-to-party passengers (lots of 20s, 30s, and 40s). Itineraries in Alaska and New England tend to appeal more to a mellower crowd mostly in their 50s and up.

The more elegant and refined of the lines are commonly referred to as **premium,** a notch up in the sophistication department from others that are described as **mass-market.** Quality-wise, they're all more similar than they are different, especially in regard to dining and entertainment. Ditto for lines such as Oceania, whose fleet of midsize ships is almost a throwback to the days before supersizing. Though these lines' ships are tiny compared with the Carnivals and Royal Caribbeans of the world, they're in this chapter because they offer well-rounded cruises for a fairly diverse mix of passengers.

Frommer's Ratings at a Glance: The Mainstream Lines

1 = poor **2** = fair **3** = good **4** = excellent **5** = outstanding

	Enjoyment Factor	Dining	Activities	Children's Program	Entertainment	Service	Worth the Money
Azamara	5	4	4	N/A	4	5	5
Carnival	4	3	3	4	3	3	4
Celebrity	5	4	4	3	3	5	5
Costa	3	2	4	2	3	2	3
Cunard	5	4	5	5	4	4	5
Disney	4	3	3	5	5	3	4
Holland America	4	4	3	2	4	5	5
MSC Cruises	3	3	2	3	3	2	4
Norwegian	5	4	4	4	4	4	5
Oceania	4	4	2	N/A	3	4	4
Princess	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Royal Caribbean	5	4	5	4	4	4	5

Note: Cruise lines have been graded on a curve that compares them only with the other mainstream lines. See "How to Read the Ratings," in chapter 5, for a detailed explanation of the ratings methodology.

DRESS CODES For the most part, just about anything goes. Norwegian Cruise Line was the first to completely do away with "mandatory" formal nights earlier this decade, and many of the other mainstream lines have followed. Aside from Oceania (which are all casual, all the time), the rest of the lines in this chapter still have one or two formal (or "formal optional") nights a week, with the remaining nights designated as semiformal and casual. Most ships also have at least one casual dining venue open every night in case you just can't face dressing up at all. (See chapter 3 for more about dress codes.)

1 Azamara Cruises

1050 Caribbean Way, Miami, FL 33132. ✆ **877/999-9553.** www.azamaracruises.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL Launched in mid-2007, Azamara Cruises is a more high-end and adult-oriented sub-brand of Celebrity Cruises, offering more out-of-the-way itineraries, better service and cuisine, more enrichment opportunities, and lots of little extras that make the experience superspecial. The line's two ships are mid-size gems that were originally built for now-defunct Renaissance Cruises. **Sails to:** Caribbean, Panama Canal (plus Europe, Asia, transatlantic).

THE EXPERIENCE The idea behind Azamara is pretty much the same idea that animates all the other former Renaissance vessels, whoever they sail for: smaller, more intimate ships sailing longer itineraries, visiting out-of-the-ordinary ports, and offering a casual yet country-clubbish experience, with great service. That's not to call

Azamara a copycat, though. Fact is, there are only so many different kinds of cruise experiences you can offer, and this is the kind that these ships were made for. In an age dominated by bigger and bigger megaships, we welcome the return of midsize vessels with open arms. Kudos to Celebrity/Azamara for putting the resources into keeping this kind of cruise option alive.

Overall (and like Oceania), Azamara offers an experience that straddles the mainstream and luxury segments of the cruise biz—somewhere between Celebrity and Crystal or Regent. On the Pool Deck, a quiet jazz trio replaces the kind of loud pop/reggae band found on most mainstream ships, and in the cafe you'll often find a harpist plucking out traditional and classical tunes, spiced with pop standards. Service is exceptional, from the butlers who attend to all cabins to little touches such as the cold towels offered at the gangway after a hot day in port. At dinner, things are entirely flexible—just show up when you like, at the main restaurant, at two reservations-only alternatives, or at a casual but still waiter-serviced option in the buffet restaurant. Onboard activities run from the usual (bingo, napkin folding, team trivia) to the unusual, including poetry reading/writing get-togethers and seminars on the Afrikaans language. At night you can take in a floor show at the theater, catch a performance by a guest magician or comedian, do the karaoke thing, watch a late-night movie, or take in music in several of the public rooms.

Pros

- **Perfect-size ships:** *Azamara Journey* and *Azamara Quest* are just the right size—large enough to keep things interesting over a long itinerary, but small enough to be cozy, comfortable, and easy to navigate.
- **Long, interesting itineraries:** On their 12-night Caribbean itineraries, Azamara's ships concentrate on smaller, more interesting ports such as Virgin Gorda, Dominica, and Bequia.
- **Interesting and unusual grace notes:** At breakfast, passengers can get fresh fruit or vegetable juice or a smoothie at a bar in the buffet. At the pool grill, there are hot pretzels available all day. Public areas are dotted with ornate fresh flower displays. In the public bathrooms, real rolled towels replace the cheesy paper kind. And when was the last time you went to a shipboard workshop on performing Shakespearean monologues?
- **Nonsmoking policy:** Smoking is permitted only in one corner of the Pool Deck and one corner of the nightclub. (Of course, this is a "con" for smokers.)

Cons

- **Crowded pool deck on sunny days:** On warm sea days, the smallish pool deck can get packed to the gills. Compensating factor? The wonderful, thickly cushioned wooden deck chairs.
- **No children's program:** The lack of any kind of kids' programs or playrooms discourages families from bringing kids on board—which may be the point, actually.

AZAMARA: MICROCHIC

When Renaissance Cruises folded in 2001, its beautiful fleet of eight identical and almost brand-new midsize ships was disbursed to the four winds. Oceania got two (and later a third), Princess got two (and later a third), and two ended up being operated by Pullmantur S.A., Spain's largest cruise line. In late 2006, **Celebrity Cruises'** parent company, Royal Caribbean, purchased Pullmantur and soon pulled the old

Compared with the other mainstream lines, here's how Azamara rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor					✓
Dining				✓	
Activities				✓	
Children's Program	N/A				
Entertainment				✓	
Service					✓
Worth the Money					✓

switcheroo, sending Celebrity's elderly *Zenith* to Spain and claiming the two ex-Renaissance ships in her place. Around them, Celebrity created an entirely new cruise line dedicated to longer, more exotic itineraries, taking in ports not frequented by the vast majority of mainstream ships. And thus was born Azamara Cruises.

For 2010, *Azamara Journey* will be the line's only ship sailing the regions covered in this book.

PASSENGER PROFILE

The line draws from the typical cruise demographic, roughly **ages 45 and up.** The relatively long and unusual itineraries and the quiet onboard atmosphere appeal to a more cultured, accomplished crowd, while the higher-than-mass-market prices and the length of the itineraries favor retirees. The majority of passengers on Caribbean and Panama Canal sailings are Americans, along with a smattering from Canada, Europe, Asia, and South America.

The lack of children's programming limits the number of families with kids who book this line, while the **stringent smoking regulations** mean few smokers sail Azamara. (Smoking is prohibited everywhere on board except in the aft port-side section of the Looking Glass Lounge and in the starboard forward section of the Pool Deck.)

DINING

Dining on Azamara is a step up from Celebrity in both cuisine and presentation. Dining service—which is excellent on Celebrity—is at least as good here, and probably a little better. At mealtimes, passengers have full flexibility in terms of where, when, and with whom they dine. Dinner is available in four restaurants: one traditional, two specialty, and one casual.

TRADITIONAL The main dining room aboard each ship is a one-level space with tables for 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10, serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner, the latter within a 3½-hour window. Menus run to five courses, with passengers able to choose from among five appetizers, three soups, two salads, and five main courses. Appetizer selections may include dishes such as marinated and cured salmon in cucumber dill cream; beef, Gruyere, and caramelized onion turnover; wild mushroom and chicken quiche; and scallops with Thai curry sauce and coconut rice cake. Soups might include oven-roasted tomato and garlic soup with goat cheese crostini; Louisiana gumbo with andouille sausage and okra; and rustic cannellini bean soup with beef, basil, roasted tomato, and olive oil. For main courses, expect the likes of herb-crusted South African white fish with toasted quinoa; sesame seared yellow-fin tuna steak with tamarind

stir-fried Asian vegetables; New York strip steak with roasted potatoes, green beans, and blue-cheese butter; penne pasta tossed with four cheeses; and beef short ribs braised in red Burgundy wine with creamy polenta, carrots, and turnips. In addition, you can always choose from an assortment of **classic favorites** (grilled filet of salmon with herb butter, lemon-marinated roasted chicken, and so on). Unlike Celebrity, Azamara does not offer a dedicated **vegetarian** menu, though options are always available or can be made by request. (We had some wonderful vegetarian curries while aboard *Journey.*)

SPECIALTY Each ship has two specialty, reservations-only restaurants. Passengers get one free specialty dinner per cruise (two per cruise for suite passengers) and are free to make as many additional reservations as they like, paying the regular per-person cost.

Set in the stern on Deck 10, **Prime C** is a classic steakhouse with a hardwood floor and dark wall paneling, a chunky wooden bar, a mix of modern art and classic Hollywood photos, and wraparound windows. The per-person cost is $25. Appetizers here include chilled jumbo shrimp cocktail, beef carpaccio, crispy popcorn rock shrimp, and lump crab cake. There's also a selection of soups and salads. Main courses run just like you'd figure, with a choice of steaks (16-oz. cowboy bone-in rib-eye, 12-oz. New York strip, 8-oz. filet mignon, or 8-oz. Kobe-style flat-iron), chops (double-cut Colorado lamb chop, 14-oz. veal chop, or 12-oz. Berkshire pork chop), and "other" (including oven-roasted sea bass, sesame grilled tuna, roasted organic chicken, surf 'n' turf, or seafood pappardelle). At the entrance to the restaurant, a raised table for 14 is set up in front of a glass-fronted wine locker and is used for **wine-appreciation seminars.**

Right next door, **Aqualina** is a Mediterranean/American restaurant adorned with white faux pillars, a rich sea-blue carpet, and a bright, sunny vibe that contrasts with Prime C's manly woodiness. Appetizers include pan-seared diver scallops and brie in crisp phyllo dough with candied pecans and cranberry compote. There's also a selection of soups and salads. Main courses include sautéed Chilean sea bass, rock lobster thermidor and lobster pot pie, and veal *osso bucco* with a butternut-squash ragout. Passengers can dine off the regular menu (at $20 per person) or choose the $50 **tasting menu,** which includes wine but does not include a gratuity for your servers.

CASUAL Each ship offers a traditional buffet restaurant with seating inside or on a nice stern-facing outdoor deck. In the morning, the restaurant has all the standards (eggs, bacon and sausage, made-to-order omelets, Virginia ham, cheese blintzes, a fruit selection, breads, a cold cereal bar, and so on), plus two nice extra touches: a separate window for waffles and pancakes, and a **juice bar** where attendants will whip you up a fresh carrot-apple, tomato, or carrot-ginger juice (or whatever combination you like), or a fresh smoothie. This is a true rarity in the cruise market and a wonderful, healthful touch. At lunch, the buffet serves an adventurous spread of salads, meats, pastas, and other dishes.

At night, the buffet is transformed, with one section given over to **Breeza,** a casual restaurant where passengers can order from a fixed menu or, if they choose, wander over to the buffet for fresh sushi, made-to-order pasta, and other options. Though dining here is technically by reservation, you can usually do walk-ins. Guests sitting elsewhere in the restaurant are free to graze the buffet.

Out on deck, the **poolside grill** offers the usual burgers, hot dogs, veggie burgers, and pizza, plus fun oddities such as seafood-and-veggie shish kabobs, gyros, hot pretzels, and nachos. Toppings such as grilled onions and mushrooms are available for the burgers.

SNACKS & EXTRAS On each ship, an **Italian-style coffee shop** offers specialized coffee drinks and fine teas at extra cost, plus a cart of free tea sandwiches, cookies, and desserts that's kept stocked from about 7am to 1am. A similar traditional **tea time** spread is put out daily between 4 and 5pm at the combo lounge/library/piano club (known as Michael's Club on *Journey* and the Drawing Room on *Quest*). **Room service** is available 24 hours a day.

ACTIVITIES

A full roster of onboard activities identifies Azamara's roots in the mainstream, though the way it's spiced with truly unusual touches shows that the line is going for more depth.

For those who like to stick to cruise ship tradition, there are pool games, team trivia contests, quizzes, darts and Ping-Pong tournaments, golf putting, shuffleboard, chess, bridge, bingo, spelling bees, pet lovers' get-togethers, and cheesy art auctions. There are also computer classes, digital photography seminars, golf clinics, and wine-appreciation seminars (some at extra cost), plus culinary demonstrations, mixology clinics, and beauty and fitness clinics offered by the spa staff. For more unusual ways to spend a spare hour, check out the **improvisational acting** and **Shakespearean monologue workshops,** the poetry writing/reading get-togethers, and the introductions to the Afrikaans language. Both ships also offer relatively large **casinos.**

The ships' spas offer the usual array of massages, facials, manicures, pedicures, body-cleansing treatments, and wraps, as well as several expensive **spa packages** that bundle a number of treatments into a themed package. One targeted at men combines a 55-minute deep-tissue sports massage with a 25-minute "Frangipani Hair & Scalp Conditioning Ritual" and a 55-minute "Pro-Collagen Grooming with Shave," the latter a mind-bogglingly wonderful succession of latherings, shaves, mild facial massages, and applications of fragrant goo. Check the prices, though: The individual elements of the package can be booked separately, and there appears to be no real savings in booking them as a package.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

None. These ships have no children's facilities or programs.

ENTERTAINMENT

Azamara offers a mixed bag of entertainment, with evenings in the show lounges rotating between musical production shows and guest comedians, magicians, and musical acts. The smaller lounges offer quality musical acts.

During our last sailing, **production shows** featured five singers/dancers backed up by a live band, with the musical selections tilted toward American standards. While production shows aren't necessarily our cup of tea, these got extra points for their intimacy (the ships' show lounges have no stage, so the performers are down at floor level, just steps from the audience), for the energy of their featured performers, and for being 100% live, with no prerecorded backing tracks or lip-synching involved. Other shows on our trip included an improv comedian, a Bermudian steel-pan player, a cabaret entertainer, and the very talented magician Carl Andrews, a regular on such lines as Celebrity, Crystal, HAL, NCL, Princess, and Regent.

Musicians perform daily in various parts of the ship. In the cafe, our cruise featured harpist/vocalist Jacqueline Dolan, who dazzled during 3-hour-long sets per day, mixing classical, traditional, and popular melodies. A pianist performed after hours, while one evening a five-piece jazz ensemble performed a set of standards and classic jazz tunes. On the Pool Deck, Azamara replaces the usual thumping dance band with a

Azamara Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Azamara Journey	**Caribbean:** 10- & 12-night eastern/southern, r/t Miami (Jan–Apr & Nov–Dec). **Panama Canal:** 16-night eastbound (Jan) & westbound (Dec) between San Diego & Miami.

quiet, subtle jazz trio of guitar, bass, and drums. Around the ship, even the piped-in background music is of a higher quality than you hear aboard most ships, mixing jazz, standards, New Agey selections, a few pop songs, and the occasional novelty number to get your attention.

For those who like to entertain themselves, there's also **karaoke** some evenings, as well as dancing in the disco "till late."

SERVICE

Service is one of the high points at Azamara, as it is aboard parent line Celebrity. In cabins, butlers do the usual cabin steward job but also help with packing/unpacking, making restaurant and spa reservations, serving full breakfasts en suite, delivering daily canapes, shining shoes, and so on. Service is unobtrusive but very personal when it does obtrude: Butlers know your name from day one and will go out of their way to greet you in the corridors. Dining service is good in the main restaurant and excellent in the specialty restaurants.

Like Celebrity, Azamara handles **tipping** automatically, with each passenger billed $12.25 per day. As at other lines, a 15% tip is automatically added to all bar transactions.

There are no self-serve laundries, just regular send-out **laundry and dry cleaning.** Captain's Club members (those who have sailed with Celebrity or Azamara before) get a booklet that, among other things, has a **coupon for bulk laundry service:** Fill up the large bag provided, and a wash/dry/fold will cost you only $15 (available all but the last day of the cruise).

Azamara Journey • Azamara Quest

The Verdict

We wish more ships were like *Journey* and *Quest:* large enough to be interesting during long itineraries, but small enough to keep things cozy, comfortable, and convenient. These are some of our favorite mainstream cruise ships.

Azamara Journey *(photo: Azamara Cruises)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	30,277	Crew	390
Passengers (double occ.)	710	Passenger/Crew Ratio	1.8 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio	42.6	Year Launched	2000
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	355/241	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	2007

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5) ★★★★

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	4
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4
Public Comfort/Space	4.5	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	4

Journey and *Quest* are exactly the kind of cruise ships we love: small scale, cozy, and traditionally decorated, with an onboard vibe that's all about passengers' personal interaction rather than eye-catching gimmicks. Like all the vessels that were originally built for Renaissance Cruises, they're more boutique hotel than Vegas resort, with a decor that hearkens back to the golden age of ocean liners—all warm woods, rich fabrics, and clubbily intimate public areas. When they took over the ships, Celebrity put nearly $40 million into major refurbishments, moving the walls around on some cabin decks to create 32 new suites on each vessel; designing new specialty restaurants; expanding the spa; adding a cafe; and installing a new art collection, decking, carpets, paint schemes, bedding, cushions, drapes, table linens, and other soft goods. The result is a pair of lovely, practically new-looking ships, with only a few dents in cabin corridors (courtesy of luggage carts) betraying the fact that they've already been in service for a decade.

For 2010, *Azamara Journey* will be the only one of the two ships sailing the regions covered in this book.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$150	158	yes	yes	yes	yes
Outside	$175	170–175	yes	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$369	266–560	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS Cabins on *Journey* and *Quest* are divided into just seven configurations: standard inside and oceanview cabins, deluxe oceanview (with veranda), Sunset veranda cabins (all facing the bow or stern), Sky Suites, Royal Suites, and Penthouse Suites.

Standard inside, oceanview, and oceanview balcony cabins are all almost identical in size and amenities. Each has a sitting area with a sofa bed and small table, a flatscreen TV that's awkwardly mounted flush to the wall (meaning you can watch only straight on from the couch), a minifridge, and a writing desk. Closet space is only just adequate for the long itineraries these vessels sail, though an abundance of drawers and storage space under the bed helps matters some. Bathrooms are on the small side, with a small shower stall and awkwardly angled toilet, and are stocked with Elemis bath products. Cabin decor is nicely understated, with off-white walls, wood-tone furnishings and headboard, and upholstery and carpeting done in easy-on-the-eyes blues and golds. More than half the accommodations on board are oceanview veranda cabins, which include a smallish 40-square-foot balcony.

Sky Suites add considerably to your elbow room and add such amenities as a 60-square-foot balcony, bathroom tub, and DVD/CD player. Royal Suites and Penthouse Suites have separate bedrooms and living rooms, balconies that run between 105 and 233 square feet, master baths with a whirlpool tub and shower, a guest bathroom, and (Penthouse Suites only) a dressing room with vanity.

Four cabins on each ship are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS Public rooms on these ships are clustered on decks 5, 9, and 10. On Deck 5 forward, the Cabaret has space to seat about half the passengers on board. It has no raised stage, so productions are, by definition, floor shows. Aside from the semicircular banquettes that divide the room's slightly elevated perimeter from the main floor, all seating is in comfortable chairs interspersed with cocktail tables. The best seat in the house is a high table at the center of the rear bar area, between and slightly behind the two spotlights. In addition to production shows, the room is used for late-night movies, bingo, and other activities. Moving toward midships, there's a relatively large casino with a big-screen TV in one corner for sports events; the ship's two understated retail shops; and the cafe, a warm, inviting space that offers snacks 18 hours a day, along with fancy, coffee drinks and teas for an extra charge. A harpist and pianist perform here regularly throughout the day.

Deck 9 is primarily given over to the buffet restaurant, pool, and spa (see below), but tucked inside one corner are an Internet center and a small conference room.

On Deck 10 forward, the Looking Glass disco/observation lounge has wrap-around floor-to-ceiling windows, a dance floor, and cocktail tables for two and four set in a large but still comfortably intimate space. Toward midships, the combo library and piano lounge maintains a generally quiet, gentlemen's club feel, with dark-wood bookcases and wall paneling, velvety couches, leather armchairs, oriental-patterned rugs, a chessboard, and a couple of globes showing the world that was. A faux fireplace, racing-dog ceramics, and a trompe l'oeil conservatory ceiling complete the picture. Afternoon tea is served here daily.

DINING OPTIONS Dining in *Journey*'s and *Quest*'s main dining room is ideally a two-step process. First, you set a time to meet your friends at the clubby, wood-paneled bar located just outside the maître d's station. Set below Sistine Chapel–esque ceiling murals there's a chunky semicircular bar, couches, and comfy armchairs, with a faux fireplace and curio cabinets separating the bar area from the dining room itself. Next, get a table for dinner, preferably in the central portion of the room, where they seem to be more widely spaced than those along the periphery. Decor-wise, the room continues the ship's overall country-club feel, with Romanesque paintings, dark-wood paneling, decorative pillars, and understated upholstery. Tables are available for 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 people.

At the stern on Deck 10, each ship's two specialty restaurants sit side by side, offering views from practically every table. Aqualina is decorated with a Mediterranean sensibility to match its menu, with a polished black tile floor and a color scheme that favors white and blue. Next door, Prime C is a thoroughgoing steakhouse. At the entrance, a wood-floored bar area is dominated by a high table for 14 at which wine-tasting seminars are given. Tables for four dominate the rest of the C-shaped restaurant.

On Deck 9, Windows Cafe is a standard buffet restaurant with a few nonstandard features. At breakfast, you can get freshly made vegetable/fruit juices or a complicated smoothie from the Health Nut juice bar, and fresh pancakes and waffles from a dedicated window to the side of the buffet lines. At dinner, the space serves sushi and custom-made pasta dishes, along with a spread of favorites. Seating is available inside and out. On the Pool Deck, the grill spices up the usual burger-and-dogs menu with seafood shish kabobs, gyros, hot pretzels, and nachos.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The Pool Deck offers one smallish pool, two hot tubs, a small performance stage, and a bar, along with some of the

best deck chairs we've ever seen—heavy, wooden, and dressed in thick navy-blue cushions with flip-back pillows. On the rear port side, a covered seating area offers double-width deck lounges for couples. On warm days at sea, the Pool Deck can get very crowded, but a little walking (not much—these are small ships) will net you much less crowded lounging spots on the Sun Deck, two levels up. There's also a lovely little half-moon of sunning space and a hot tub just forward of the gym and spa. Shade worshippers can head to the Promenade Deck, which is filled with those same great deck chairs, set under an overhang in an area that gets little traffic.

The gym, located just forward of the Pool Deck, offers treadmills, stationary bikes, elliptical trainers, dumbbells, weight machines, and a large aerobics floor. Though the space is not huge, it's adequate for the relatively small number of passengers on board. It got crowded only once during our last cruise. Pilates, spinning, stretch, abs, and yoga classes are offered throughout the cruise at no extra charge. Next door there's a salon; a spa offering treatments in several pleasant rooms; and a separate suite offering acupuncture, laser hair removal, and microdermabrasion.

A corner of the Pool Deck has Ping-Pong tables, and shuffleboard and a small golf-putting green are available on the Sun Deck.

2 Carnival Cruise Lines

3655 NW 87th Ave., Miami, FL 33178-2428. ✆ **800/227-6482** or 305/599-2200. Fax 305/405-4855. www.carnival.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL When you're hankering for an utterly unpretentious and totally laid-back cruise, Carnival's colorful, jumbo-size resort ships deliver plenty of bang for the buck. If you like the flash of Vegas and a serious party vibe, you'll love Carnival's brand of flamboyant fun. **Sails to:** Caribbean, Mexican Riviera, Alaska, Canada/New England, Hawaii (plus Europe, transatlantic).

THE EXPERIENCE The McDonald's of cruising, Carnival's got the most recognized name in the biz and serves up a very casual, down-to-earth, middle-American Caribbean vacation. Food and service are pretty decent considering the huge numbers served, and Carnival gets points for trying to offer a higher-quality vacation than in years past. Enhancements include partnering with Michelin three-star chef Georges Blanc to create a series of signature dishes for the dining rooms, switching from plastic to china in the buffet restaurants, and stocking cabins with thicker towels, duvet blankets, and more TV channels. The fleet has even gone wireless, offering Wi-Fi access throughout each ship.

On many ships in the fleet you'll find a sushi bar, supper club, wine bar, coffee bar, and great amenities for children. Like the frat boy who graduated to a button-down shirt and an office job, Carnival has definitely moved up and on to some extent. But like that reformed frat boy who still likes to meet his old pals for happy hour every week, Carnival hasn't lost touch with its past. Sure, the line's decor, like its clientele, has mellowed to some degree since its riotous, party-hearty beginnings, but each ship is still an exciting, bordering-on-nutty collage of textures, shapes, and images. Where else but on these floating play lands would you find a giant octopus-like chandelier with lights that change color, bar stools designed to look like baseball bats, or real oyster-shell wallpaper? The outrageousness of the decor is part of the fun. Evolved, yes; dull, no.

Pros

- **Fun, theme-park ambience:** The fanciful, sometimes wacko, decor on these vessels is unmatched.
- **Large standard cabins:** At 185 square feet or larger, Carnival's standard inside and outside cabins are among the roomiest in the mainstream category.
- **Melting pot at sea:** You name 'em, they'll be on a Carnival cruise, from rowdy, pierced 20-something singles and honeymooners, to *Leave It to Beaver* families with young kids, to grandparents along for the show.
- **An insomniac's delight:** When passengers on most ships are calling it a night, Carnival's guests are just getting busy with diversions such as midnight adult comedy shows, raging discos, and 24-hour pizza parlors.

Cons

- **You're never alone:** Not in the hot tubs, on shore excursions, in the pool, while sunbathing, at the gym, at the pizza counter . . . .
- **Get in line:** At breakfast and lunch, the buffet restaurants are jammed; expect a 20- to 30-minute slow shuffle through the line to get your bowl of oatmeal and scrambled eggs . . . along with a few thousand other passengers.
- **No enrichment:** Activities are pretty much confined to fun and games on the Pool Deck; no guest speakers and classes like most other mainstream lines offer.

CARNIVAL: BIG LINE, BIG FUN

Carnival has enjoyed an extended run as big cheese of the cruise world. The assets of its parent company, Carnival Corporation, are enormous and growing: In addition to the 22 ships of its Carnival brand, Carnival Corporation also owns Princess, Holland America, Costa, Cunard, and Seabourn, as well as several European and Australian lines. In total, Carnival Corporation operates a combined fleet of 88 ships, with another 17 scheduled for delivery through June 2012.

The origins of the Miami-based company were as precarious as they were accidental. Company patriarch Ted Arison, a somewhat reclusive billionaire who passed away in 1999, had sold an airfreight business in New York in 1966 and intended to retire to his native Israel to enjoy the fruits of his labor—after a few more little ventures. After he negotiated terms for chartering a ship, he assembled a group of paying passengers and then discovered that the ship's owner could no longer guarantee the vessel's availability. According to latter-day legend, a deal was hastily struck whereby Arison's passengers would be carried aboard a laid-up ship owned by Knut Kloster, a prominent Norwegian shipping magnate. The ship was brought to Miami from

Compared with the other mainstream lines, here's how Carnival rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor				✓	
Dining			✓		
Activities			✓		
Children's Program				✓	
Entertainment			✓		
Service			✓		
Worth the Money				✓	

Europe, and the combination of Arison's marketing skill and Kloster's hardware created an all-new entity that, in 1966, became the corporate forerunner of Norwegian Cruise Line.

After a bitter parting of ways with Kloster, Carnival got its start in 1972 when Arison bought *Empress of Canada,* known for its formal and somewhat stuffy administration, and reconfigured it into Carnival's first ship, the anything-but-stuffy *Mardi Gras.* After a shaky start—the brightly painted ship, carrying hundreds of travel agents, ran aground just off the coast of Miami on its first cruise—Arison managed to pick up the pieces and create a company that, under the guidance of astute and tough-as-nails company president Bob Dickinson and chairman Micky Arison (Ted's son), eventually evolved into the most influential trendsetter in the cruise ship industry. The rest is history, as they say.

Today, Carnival's fleet includes 22 ships, most of which cruise the Caribbean and The Bahamas year-round. The 110,000-ton, 2,974-passenger *Carnival Freedom,* sister to *Liberty, Valor, Conquest,* and *Glory,* is among Carnival's newest, having debuted in March 2007. In summer 2008, a new class of ship debuted. Based on the Conquest ships, the 113,000-ton, 3,006-passenger *Carnival Splendor* sports some new features, including a water park and the line's largest and most elaborate spa and kids' facilities to date. In September 2009 and June 2011, a pair of 130,000-ton ships named the *Carnival Dream* and *Carnival Magic,* respectively, will be introduced as Carnival's largest vessels so far.

PASSENGER PROFILE

In the old days, Carnival was basically a floating college frat house: Heidi sailed in 1996 when more than 500 graduating high-school seniors practically took over (and ruined) a cruise on the old *Celebration.* She still gets nightmares. Guidelines implemented in early 1997 put a stop to all of that, mandating that no one 20 or under can sail unless sharing a cabin with an adult 26 or over, with exceptions made for married couples and young people traveling with their parents in separate cabins. So, while you'll still find teen groups on board (especially Mar–June), things are not what they were.

A Carnival cruise is a huge melting pot—couples, singles, and families; young, old, and lots in between. We've met doctors on Carnival cruises as well as truck drivers. And no matter what their profession, you'll see people wearing everything from Ralph Lauren shirts and Gucci sunglasses to Harley-Davidson tank tops and eyebrow studs. Carnival estimates about 30% of passengers are under age 35, another 40% are between 35 and 55, and 30% are over age 55. At least half of all passengers are first-time cruisers. Although it's one of the best lines to choose if you're single, Carnival's ships certainly aren't overrun by singles—families and couples are definitely in the majority. The line's 3-, 4-, and 5-night cruises tend to attract the most families with kids and the highest number of 20- and 30-something single friends traveling together in groups.

Regardless of their age, passengers tend to be young at heart, ready to party, and keyed up for nonstop fun and games. Many have visited the casinos of Las Vegas and Atlantic City and the resorts of Cancún and Jamaica, and are no strangers to soaking in sardine-can hot tubs, sunbathing, hitting the piña coladas and beer before lunch, and dancing late into the night.

The typical Carnival passenger likes to dress casual, even at dinner, with sweat suits, jeans, and T-shirts just as prevalent as Dockers, sundresses, and Hush Puppies on all but formal nights—and even on formal nights, it's not uncommon for some passengers to run back to their cabins to change out of their dressier duds and put on shorts

or jeans before heading out to the discos and bars. Tuxedos are in the minority here. A few don't even bother with dressing up at all, even on formal nights. A hotel director on the *Carnival Liberty* told Heidi about the restaurant dress codes. "We're very flexible on this," he said, adding that they draw the line only at bathing suits, and T-shirts or hats with "bad words." Otherwise, just about anything goes.

DINING

Carnival's newest Spirit- and Conquest-class ships offer about as many dining venues as you'll really need, and the rest of the fleet only offers two choices: a buffet venue and a main dining room.

TRADITIONAL In its two-story "formal" dining rooms (and take *formal* with a grain of salt—some Carnival passengers don't seem to think it means anything but T-shirts and jeans), Carnival's food quality and presentation, plus its wine selection, are much improved from its early days, and for the most part on par with Royal Caribbean, Princess, and NCL. You'll find more exotic options such as chicken satay with peanut sauce and Indian-themed meals that include lamb chops, basmati rice, lentils *(dal),* and potatoes *(aloo);* as well as all-American favorites such as lobster and prime rib, plus pasta dishes, grilled salmon, and Thanksgiving-style turkey served with all the trimmings. Unfortunately, the preparation is uneven (as is true on many of the mainstream lines); one night your entree is great, the other it's blah. On a recent *Victory* cruise, top tastes included a yummy roasted pumpkin soup and a New England lobster-and-crab-cake dish. There are some 50 healthier **"Spa Carnival"** dishes (which include calorie, fat, sodium, and cholesterol stats), and **vegetarian** options are also on each menu.

Despite the hectic pace and ambience, dining service is usually friendly and somewhat classier than in earlier years, if not always the most efficient. The staff still presents dessert-time song-and-dance routines, at times quite elaborate, and passengers seem to love it. Sophistication goes only so far, however: Carnival still has its waiters handle all wine service, rather than employing sommeliers; and on the *Victory* cruise, Heidi was unpleasantly surprised to find the lights turned up abruptly at 7:45pm each evening in the dining room to urge diners to leave; it was clearly a very inelegant way to encourage any stragglers to finish their coffee and dessert ASAP and hit the road so that the staff could get ready for the second seating.

At press time, Carnival was experimenting with offering a flexible "anytime dining" option in the main restaurants on some nights. Stay tuned.

SPECIALTY *Carnival Spirit,* which debuted in spring 2001, was the line's first to have a reservations-only restaurant, a two-level supper club serving steaks and other dishes for a $30-per-person cover charge (plus tip and not including wine). Subsequent Spirit-class and Conquest-class ships—and all future Carnival ships—have this

Carnival's Vacation Guarantee

Unhappy with your Carnival cruise? Dissatisfied guests may debark at their first non-U.S. port of call and, subject to some restrictions, get a refund for the unused portion of their cruise and reimbursement for coach-class airfare back to their ship's home port. To qualify, passengers must inform the ship's purser before their first port of call.

intimate alternative venue. Here, service is more gracious, and dedicated sommeliers are on hand to take your wine order. Menus are leather-bound, and elegant table settings feature beautiful Versace show plates and Rosenthal, Fortessa, and Revol china. Tables for two and four are available, and a musician or two serenade diners with soft ballads. There's even a dance floor. Like in a traditional steakhouse, the menu includes starters, salads, and side dishes such as creamed spinach and mashed potatoes. The steaks range from New York strip to porterhouse and filet mignon, and other options include grilled lamb chops, as well as fish and chicken dishes. The experience is intentionally designed to be slow and lingering, so don't go if you're looking for a fast meal. The food and service are the most doting you'll find on Carnival.

CASUAL At the opposite end of the alternative-dining spectrum, guests aboard all Carnival ships can opt to have any meal in the buffet-style Lido restaurants at no extra charge. For an unstructured and casual dinner, walk in anytime between about 6 and 9:30pm for serve-yourself entrees such as chicken, pasta, stir-fry, and carved meats. At lunch, buffets in the Lido feature the usual suspects—salads, meats, cheeses, pastas, grilled burgers, and chicken filets, and several hot choices such as fish and chips, roast turkey, and stir-fry. The lunchtime buffets also feature specialty stations, serving up things such as pasta or Chinese food, fish and chips, and a rotisserie meat option. All ships have a deli station for sandwiches; a pizza station open 24 hours, where you can also get a Caesar salad; and an outlet for grilled chicken sandwiches, burgers, hot dogs, and fries—just be prepared for a looooooong line at lunchtime, as the Carnival crowd loves burgers and fries. In general, the various buffet sections can get backed up at times as passengers wait for bins to be restocked and servers scramble to fill them. Though the food is unmemorable, upgrades to tableware are not: Kudos to Carnival for bringing in colorful ceramic sugar bowls, salt and pepper shakers, and dinnerware in place of the old white plastic stuff.

SNACKS & EXTRAS But wait, there's more: Carnival ships give you 24-hour pizza (with as many as 500 pies flipped a day!), calzones that are surprisingly tasty, Caesar salad with or without chicken, and self-serve soft ice cream and frozen yogurt, as well as a complimentary **sushi bar** in the promenade on the newest ships (on older ships, sushi is served in the Lido buffet restaurants at lunch or dinner), and a deli on some vessels. There are late-night eats offered in the buffet restaurant daily. The newest ships also have specialty (read: not free) coffee and pastry bars, some with milkshakes and banana splits, too.

All ships offer **24-hour room service,** with a new menu including such items as paninis and a focaccia sandwich with grilled zucchini, fresh mozzarella, and portobello mushrooms, plus the standard tuna salad, cookies, fruit, and so on. Kids can select from **children's menus.** Kids and adults can buy the Funship Fountain Card for unlimited fountain sodas throughout the cruise; a nifty plastic cup with a lid is usually part of the deal.

ACTIVITIES

Carnival's all about lounging by the pool, drink in hand (or bucket of beers at foot), and soaking up the sun and some loud music or whatever **goofy contests** may be taking place. On sea days, you can get a hoot out of watching (or joining, if you're not the wallflower type) the men's hairy chest contest or similar tomfoolery, participate in a trivia contest, or sign up for some group dancing lessons. A blaring band will play a few sets by the pool, and on nearly half the fleet (including all newbuilds going forward), a **giant video screen** smack-dab in the center of the pool area broadcasts movies,

concerts, and various shipboard activities at eardrum-shattering decibels (and do we mean loud—don't expect to have a conversation without shouting). Currently, there's one on *Splendor, Liberty, Freedom, Conquest, Glory, Valor, Victory, Destiny,* and *Triumph.*

On all but the line's oldest ships, it's a little quieter up on the second tier of the Sun Deck, and each ship has a quieter pool and sunbathing area at the stern, sans loudspeakers. Spirit-class vessels have a second midships pool separated from the main action by a bar and solid dividers that keep most of the noise out and provide a more serene lounging space; one of the four pools on the Conquest-class ships is quieter and covered by a retractable glass roof.

Slot machines begin clanging by 8 or 9 in the morning in the **casinos** when the ships are at sea (tables open at 11am), and servers start tempting passengers with trays of fruity theme cocktails long before the lunch hour. Expect to hear the ubiquitous art auctioneer shouting into a microphone about some Peter Max masterpiece. There are **line-dancing and ballroom classes,** trivia contests, facial and hairdo demonstrations (intended to entice passengers to sign up for expensive treatments), singles and newlywed parties, game shows, shuffleboard, bingo, art auctions, and movies. Overall, though, there's not as much variety of activities as aboard lines such as Norwegian, Holland America, and Celebrity (read: absolutely no enrichment lectures on history or other cerebral topics).

You can spend some time in the roomy gyms on the Fantasy-, Destiny-, Spirit-, and Conquest-class ships (and take the handful of **free aerobics classes** or the ones that cost $10, such as Pilates, yoga, and spinning) or playing volleyball on the top deck, or treat yourself to one of dozens of relaxing (and expensive) treatments in the Steiner-managed **spas.** All ships have covered and lighted golf driving nets, with **golf pros** sailing on board to give lessons with video analysis starting at $25 for a 15-minute session and $80 for an hour. Pros also accompany guests on golf excursions on shore, and clubs, golf shoes, balls, gloves, and other paraphernalia are available for rent.

If you want to escape it all and find a truly quiet nook for a while, retire to the subdued libraries/card/game rooms and 24-hour **Internet centers** on each ship; you'll find Wi-Fi service fleetwide as well. You can also now use your cellphone while at sea or in port.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

Carnival is right up there with the best ships for families—the line estimates that about 625,000 kids sail aboard its ships annually. Some 600 to 800 children per cruise is pretty normal, and there can be in the neighborhood of 1,000 on holiday cruises and during the summer months, when it'll be difficult to find a kid-free hot tub. On Carnival's post-1990 ships, the **child facilities** are fairly extensive, with the Conquest-class, Spirit-class, and Destiny-class ships, as well as *Elation* and *Paradise,* offering the biggest and brightest playrooms in the fleet, with arts and crafts, oodles of toys and games, video screens and televisions showing movies and cartoons, and computer stations loaded with the latest educational and entertainment software. The facilities on the line's older ships—including the oldest, *Celebration* and *Holiday*—are no competition.

The **Camp Carnival program** offers complimentary supervised kids' activities on sea days nearly nonstop from 9am to 10pm, and on port days, from 8am (or earlier, if there are shore excursions departing earlier) for ages 2 through 14 in four age groups: toddlers 2 to 5, juniors 6 to 8, intermediates 9 to 11, and teens 12 to 14. The latter are part of a new teen program called Circle C. Ten to 16 counselors (all of whom are trained in CPR and first aid) organize the fun and games on each ship,

which include face painting, computer games, puzzles, fun with Play-Doh, picture bingo, pirate hat making, and pizza parties for toddlers. For juniors, there's PlayStation, computer games, ice-cream parties, story time and library visits, T-shirt coloring, and swimming. For intermediates, there are scavenger hunts, trivia and bingo, Ping-Pong, video-game competitions, arts and crafts, computer games, dance classes, and talent shows. Across all age groups, activities with a somewhat educational bent may include art projects with papier-mâché, oil paintings, and watercolors; music appreciation, which gets kids acquainted with different musical instruments; science projects where kids can make their own ice cream and create minihelicopters; and a fitness program that encourages today's couch-potato computer-head kids to actually get up and run around. Club 02 teen centers are geared to the 15- to 17-year-old set and are quite elaborate on the newest ships. Besides karaoke parties, computer games, scavenger hunts, talent shows, card and trivia games, and Ping-Pong, teens can watch movies at the centers and go to dance parties. Some ships are also equipped with iMacs, but there is no Internet center specifically for teens like some ships offer. Of course, teens can also hang out in the video arcades—the newest ships have virtual-reality games and air-hockey tables. For something more refined, Carnival now offers a collection of spa treatments geared to teens (along with their parents).

The entire fleet has children's wading pools, though they're very basic compared to what you'll find on some of the Royal Caribbean, Celebrity, NCL, and Princess ships, and for bigger kids there's a great signature snaking slide at the main pool of each ship. A popular activity is the Water Wars water-balloon attraction that's based on a diversion offered in amusement parks around the world. It basically boils down to teams flinging water balloons at each other with catapults.

Parents wanting a kid-free evening can make use of the supervised children's activities, offered from 7 to 10pm nightly free of charge, after which time group **slumber-party-style babysitting** kicks in for ages 6 months through age 11 until 3am in the playroom, at $6 per hour for the first child, $4 per hour for each additional child. No private babysitting is available. Infants between 6 and 23 months can also be cared for on port days between 8am and noon, but it's considered babysitting and the hourly fee mentioned above will apply. On sea days between noon and 2pm, you can also drop off children 1 and under at the rate above, or parents may use the playroom with their babies for these 2 hours at no charge. And, yes, counselors will change diapers (though parents are asked to provide them, along with wipes)! Parents with kids age 8 and under checked into the children's program get free use of cellphones on most ships, in case their kids need to contact them. A handful of strollers are available for rent fleetwide for $25 for 7- and 8-night cruises (less for shorter cruises), and a limited number of bouncy seats, travel swings, and Game Boys are for rent.

Mom and Dad can get an earlier start on their kid-free evening, when the counselors supervise **kids' mealtime** in the Lido restaurant between about 6 and 7pm in a special section reserved for kids; it's offered nightly except the first night of the cruise. The children's dining room menu, printed on the back of a fun coloring/activity book (crayons are provided), features the usual favorites—hot dogs, hamburgers, french

Handy Hot Line

Carnival offers a 24-hour hot line for help with unexpected snafus or emergencies. Call ✆ **877/885-4856** toll-free, or 305/406-4779.

fries, chicken nuggets, pepperoni pizza, peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches, banana splits, Jell-O, and a daily special.

Cribs are available if you request them when making your reservations. When you first board, head for the kids' playroom to get a schedule for the week and to sign up your child for the program. Children must be at least 6 months old to sail on board.

ENTERTAINMENT

Aboard its newer megaships, Carnival has spent millions on stage sets, choreography, and sound equipment. The theaters on the Conquest-class, Spirit-class, and Destiny-class ships are spectacular three-deck extravaganzas, and the casinos are so large you'll think you've died and gone to Vegas; but even aboard its smaller, older ships, Carnival consistently offers some of the most lavish entertainment extravaganzas afloat.

Carnival megaships each carry about 8 to 16 flamboyantly costumed dancers (fewer on *Celebration* and *Holiday*) for twice- or thrice-weekly **Vegas-style musicals.** One or two live soloists carry the musical part of the show, while dancers lip-sync the chorus. A 7- to 10-piece orchestra of traditional and digital instruments deftly accompanies the acts each night, sometimes enhanced by synchronized recorded music. You'll also find comedians, jugglers, acrobats, rock-'n'-roll bands, country-and-western bands, classical string trios, pianists, and Tommy Dorsey– or Glenn Miller–style big bands, all performing during the same cruise, and sometimes on the same night. Special entertainment may include a local mariachi band when a ship's in port late in Cozumel.

Besides the main theater, most entertainment happens somewhere along the indoor Main Street–like promenade (except on the Spirit-class ships, which are more spread out). Many are called the "Something-or-other Boulevard" or "Something-or-other Way." This area stretches along one entire side of each ship and is lined with just about the entire repertoire of the ship's nightclubs, bars, lounges, patisseries, disco, and casino. One bar on all the Fantasy-, Destiny-, Spirit-, and Conquest-class ships welcomes cigar smoking, and fleetwide, cigars are sold at the pool bar and during midnight buffets.

By day, entertainment includes an ultraloud Caribbean-style calypso or steel-drum band performing Bob Marley tunes and other pop songs on a deck poolside, and a pianist, guitarist, or string trio playing in the atria of the line's newest ships. The *Splendor*, *Liberty, Freedom, Conquest, Glory, Valor, Victory, Destiny,* and *Triumph* all sport a giant video screen up on the Pool Deck (and all newbuilds will get one) that tends to monopolize much of the day by loudly (and we mean loudly) broadcasting concerts, movies, and shipboard activities. Personally, we don't like 'em. Sure, a couple of movies in the late afternoon and evening are nice, but who needs the thing screeching away all day long?

SERVICE

All in all, a Carnival ship is a well-oiled machine, and you'll certainly get what you need—but not much more. When you board, for instance, you're welcomed by polite and well-meaning staff at the gangway, given a diagram of the ship's layout, and then pointed in the right direction to find your cabin on your own, carry-on luggage in tow. Chalk it all up to the size of the line's ships. It's a fact of life that service aboard all megaliners is simply not as attentive as that aboard smaller vessels—with thousands of guests to help, your dining-room waiter and cabin steward have a lot of work ahead of them and have little time for chitchat. Lines can get long at the breakfast and lunch

Carnival Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Conquest	**Caribbean:** 7-night western & 7-night eastern, r/t Galveston (year-round).
Destiny	**Caribbean:** 4- & 5-night, r/t Miami (year-round).
Ecstasy	**Caribbean:** 4- & 5-night western, r/t Galveston (year-round).
Elation	**U.S. West Coast:** 3- & 4-night Ensenada/Catalina Island, r/t San Diego (year-round).
Fantasy	**Caribbean:** 4- & 5-night western, r/t Mobile, AL (year-round).
Fascination	**Bahamas:** 4- & 5-night Bahamas/Key West, r/t Jacksonville, FL (year-round).
Freedom	**Caribbean:** 6- & 8-night, r/t Fort Lauderdale (year-round).
Glory	**Caribbean:** 7-night, r/t Miami (year-round).
Imagination	**Bahamas:** 3-night, r/t Miami (year-round). Alternates with **Caribbean:** 4-night, r/t Miami (year-round).
Inspiration	**Caribbean:** 4- & 5-night western, r/t Tampa (year-round).
Legend	**Caribbean:** 7-night western, r/t Tampa (year-round).
Liberty	**Caribbean:** alternating 7-night eastern & western, r/t Miami (year-round).
Miracle	**Caribbean:** 8-night southern, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Jan–Mar, Oct–Dec). 8-night western, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Jan–Apr, Oct–Dec). 8-night eastern, r/t New York (Apr–Oct). **Bermuda:** 6-night, r/t New York (Apr). **Cruise to Nowhere:** 2-night, r/t New York (Oct).
Paradise	**West Coast/Mexico:** 3- & 4-night Ensenada/Catalina Island, r/t Long Beach, CA (year-round).
Pride	**Bahamas:** 7-night Bahamas/Florida, r/t Baltimore (year-round).
Sensation	**Bahamas:** 3- & 4-night, r/t Port Canaveral (year-round).
Spirit	**Mexican Riviera:** 8-night, r/t San Diego (Jan–Mar, Oct–Dec). **Hawaii:** 12-night, Ensenada to Honolulu & Honolulu to Vancouver (Apr), Vancouver to Honolulu & Honolulu to Ensenada (Sept).**Alaska:** 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Seattle (May–Aug). 6-night Inside Passage, r/t Vancouver (May). **Baja:** 4- & 5-night r/t San Diego (Oct).
Splendor	**Mexican Riviera:** 7-night, r/t Long Beach (year-round).
Triumph	**Caribbean:** 7-night eastern (Jan–May & July–Dec), 7-night western (Jan–July & Sept–Dec), 5-night western (Jan–Aug & Oct–Dec) & 4- & 5-night western (year-round).
Valor	**Caribbean:** 7-night western, r/t Miami (year-round).
Victory	**Caribbean:** 7-night southern, r/t San Juan (year-round).

buffets and, at certain times, at the pizza counter, though there always seem to be plenty of drink servers roaming the pool decks, looking to score drink orders.

Service certainly doesn't benefit from Carnival's **automatic tipping policy.** Like most of the major lines these days, gratuities for the crew are automatically added to your account at the end of your cruise to the tune of $10 per person, per day fleetwide, and they're divvied up among the staff automatically. You can adjust the amount—or eliminate it completely and hand out cash in envelopes—by visiting the purser's desk. On Carnival and the other lines with automatic tipping policies, we've found waiters and cabin stewards don't seem as eager to please as they did when the tip carrot was hanging directly over them.

There is a **laundry service** aboard each ship for washing and pressing only (with per-piece charges), as well as a handful of **self-service laundry rooms** with irons and coin-operated washers and dryers. There's a pleasant-smelling liquid soap and shampoo dispenser in cabin bathrooms fleetwide, plus a small basket of trial-size toiletries (refilled only upon request).

Spa treatments can now be prebooked online at www.carnival.com, assuming your cruise booking is paid in full.

The Conquest Class: Carnival Conquest • Glory • Valor • Liberty • Freedom • Splendor

Carnival Splendor *(photo: Carnival Cruise Lines)*

The Verdict

The best of the Carnival bunch to be sure, the Conquest class offers the fleet's largest children's and teen's facilities, a giant video screen on the Pool Deck, and plenty of bars and lounges—all packaged in a pastiche of both pleasing and jarring colors and design themes.

Specifications

Size (in tons)		Passenger/Crew Ratio	
Conquest/Glory/Valor/Liberty/Freedom	110,000	*Conquest/Glory/Valor/Liberty/Freedom*	2.5 to 1
Splendor	113,300		
Passengers (double occ.)		*Splendor*	2.6 to 1
Conquest/Glory/Valor/Liberty/Freedom	2,974	Year Launched	
Splendor	3,006	*Conquest*	2002
Passenger/Space Ratio		*Glory*	2003
Conquest/Glory/Valor/Liberty/Freedom	37	*Valor*	2004
Splendor	37.7	*Liberty*	2005
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins		*Freedom*	2007
Conquest/Glory/Valor/Liberty/Freedom	1,487/556	*Splendor*	2008
Splendor	1,503/589	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Crew		*Conquest/Glory/Valor/Liberty/Freedom*	2008/2009
Conquest/Glory/Valor/Liberty/Freedom	1,160		
Splendor	1,160	*Splendor*	N/A

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5) ★★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4.5	Dining Options	4
Appearance & Upkeep	5	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	5
Public Comfort/Space	4.5	Children's Facilities	4.5
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	4

The five 110,000-ton 2,974-passenger sisters were Carnival's largest vessels until the slightly larger *Carnival Splendor* was launched in mid-2008. *Splendor,* an evolutionary step beyond the previous five, is still very much the same overall but with, of course, certain changes. The $500-million Conquest-class ships closely resemble the Destiny series, though they stretch about 60 feet longer and add Spirit-class features such as supper clubs. If all berths are occupied, each Conquest liner can carry an eyebrow-raising 3,700-plus passengers (that's not counting the more than 1,000 crew). These mondo megas boast more than 20 bars and lounges, a giant video screen on deck, Carnival's largest children's facilities, and an entire, separate zone dedicated to teens and 'tweens. Each has a state-of-the-art "teleradiology" system that enables the ship's doctors to digitally transmit X-rays and other patient information to medical facilities on shore for consultation on a broad range of medical situations.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$53	185	yes	yes	no	yes
Outside	$71	185–220	yes	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$156	275–345	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS Standard outside cabins measure a roomy 220 square feet. These categories (6A and 6B) take up most of the Riviera and Main decks. Of the ship's outside cabins, over 60% (556 of 917; 589 of 926 on *Splendor*) offer balconies. The standard balcony cabins (categories 8A–8E) measure a still-ample 185 square feet plus a 35-square-foot balcony. For those who simply must have a bigger balcony, a little extra dough buys an "extended balcony" (60 sq. ft.) or "wraparound large balcony." There are only a handful of these category-9A accommodations, and they're tucked all the way aft on the Upper, Empress, and Verandah decks. The 42 suites are a full 275 square feet plus a 65-square-foot balcony, and bigger still are the 10 Penthouse Suites at 345 square feet plus an 85-square-foot balcony. Most of the suites are sandwiched in the middle of the ship on the Empress Deck and between two other accommodations decks, eliminating the danger of noisy public rooms above or below. Specially designed family staterooms, at a comfortable but not roomy 230 square feet, are located one deck below the children's facilities, and a couple of them can be connected to the room next door. In lieu of a private veranda, these family staterooms feature floor-to-ceiling windows for ocean views.

All categories of cabins come with a TV, safe, hand-held hair dryer (not the wall-mounted, wimpy variety), stocked minifridge (items consumed are charged to your onboard account), desk/dresser, chair and stool, and bathroom with shower and a handy makeup/shaving mirror. But the best part about Carnival's cabins these days is the beds. Called the Carnival Comfort Bed sleep system, they're darn comfortable.

Mattresses, duvets, linens, and pillows are superthick and ultracomfy. The towels and bathrobes in each cabin are pretty luxurious too.

Carnival Splendor is the first Carnival ship to offer spa staterooms and suites. The 68 specially enhanced rooms with their Asian decor and private elevator access to the spa have Cloud 9 Spa logo items such as bathrobes, towels, and slippers, plus in-room amenity kits with brand-name samples for both men and women, pre-cruise concierge consultation, as well as personal fitness bands and yoga mats.

There are 28 cabins for passengers with disabilities.

PUBLIC AREAS The Conquest ships are bright and playful—a sort of Mardi Gras feel instead of the dark and glittery Las Vegas look sported by some of the older ships in the fleet. Architect Joe Farcus was inspired by the great Impressionist and post-Impressionist artists—not only their paintings, but also their color palette—so *Conquest* bursts with sunny yellows and oranges, and vivid blues and greens. Maybe Farcus is running a little low on inspiration these days, as the *Glory*'s theme also revolves around "color," with public rooms bearing names such as the White Heat Dance Club, the Amber Palace (show lounge), and On the Green (golf-themed sports bar). On the *Valor,* a liberally applied "heroism" theme connects everything from the Bronx Bar Yankee–themed sports bar with white leather bar stools and banquettes designed to look like baseballs, to the One Small Step disco, a tribute to Neil Armstrong's walk on the moon a la weird little volcano-like craters that stand several feet tall and glow with LED lighting. On the *Liberty,* "artisans and their crafts" is how Farcus describes the motif. In some places it works better than others. The Paparazzi wine bar is a cool place that's all about photography. A huge 3-D collage of photographs of celebrities covers the walls, while images of cameras make up the ceiling and bar front. The floral laminate walls overlaid with wrought-iron-like curlicues in *Liberty*'s atrium, stair landings, and elevators, on the other hand, may be a little much. As might be imagined, Farcus has come up with a whole new look for the public rooms on *Carnival Splendor,* including the pink look and the pearls in the main dining rooms and elevator areas; the very stylish El Mojito with its Havana look; El Morocco, a cabaret lounge evoking memories of the famous 1930s New York club; and the Cool Lounge, a jazz bar paying homage to the great Miles Davis.

The general arrangement of public areas on these ships closely resembles that of the Destiny class, with a pair of two-story main dining rooms (one midships, one aft), a three-deck-high showroom within the bow, and a secondary lounge in the stern.

As on the Destiny ships, passengers step across the gangway and onto the base of a soaring nine-deck-high atrium, dressed to the nines in each ship's respective theme. On the *Conquest,* for example, it's a mural collage of works by masters such as Claude Monet, Paul Gauguin, and Edgar Degas, with backlit flowers of Murano glass popping up from the granite-topped atrium bar. On the *Liberty,* a giant octopus-like black wrought-style chandelier is the focal point, and its many "arms" support light bulbs that continually change color. On *Splendor,* the walls are covered with a composite material made of stainless steel and 4-inch circular cut-outs backed by pink-stained wood with black pigment rubbed into the grain, along with gold-leaf beams and arches illuminated with hundreds of sparkling lights; it's an amazing look. Each vessel sports 22 bars and lounges, many of these rooms clustered on the Atlantic and Promenade decks.

The 1,400-seat Show Lounge stages Carnival's big production shows. On the *Valor,* it's called Ivanhoe and it comes complete with knights in shining armor a la Sir Walter Scott's classic tale. *Splendor*'s Vrooom pays tributes to rock-'n'-roll greats such as Elvis, Bob Seger, and Huey Lewis and the News as well as the British invasion and Motown. There's also a secondary entertainment venue for dance bands and late-night comedians, as well as a piano bar, wine bar (the best place for people-watching, as it's open to the main promenade), and another live-music venue where combos belt out oldies, country, and requests.

Nobody does disco better than Carnival. You can groove on an enormous floor (on the *Conquest,* it's a jungle ambience straight from the exotic paintings of Henri Rousseau; on the *Valor,* it's all about the moon; and on *Liberty,* the theme is tattoos), or just perch with a drink on funky bar stools (lotus shaped on the *Conquest,* and hand shaped on the *Liberty,* for example). One deck down is the ships' most elegant lounge, done in wood paneling and dark, rich colors. The Internet cafe is tucked away off a back corner of the room; it's a real quiet retreat, if you can find it.

The casinos sprawl across 8,500 square feet, packing in almost 300 slot machines and about two dozen gaming tables. To one side is the sports bar; on the *Liberty,* the theme of boxing is worked into the furniture and decor.

These ships boast by far the biggest children's facilities in the fleet: At 4,200 square feet, Children's World and the separate 1,800-square-foot teen center offer more than triple the space for kids and teens available on Destiny-class ships. Children's World sits atop the spa (instead of sharing the same deck, as on the Destiny vessels) and holds an arts-and-crafts station, video wall, computer lab, PlayStation game units, and lots of fun toys for younger children, from play kitchens to push toys, mini-sliding boards, farm sets, and more. The enclosed adjacent deck offers a dipping pool that's oddly industrial looking when compared to the kids' pools on many NCL, Celebrity, Disney, and Royal Caribbean ships. The ships' nod to teenagers is a big one. Teen facilities on earlier ships were, at most, a room, but here's a space so large it forms its own secondary promenade, branching off the main one. The teen area has a soda bar and separate dance floor flowing into a huge video games area with air-hockey tables that is open to all passengers. At press time, an inflatable laser tag arena was getting raves on *Valor;* for $5 all ages can have a go of it (activities there are blown up and put on theater stage several times per cruise). The children's play area on *Carnival Splendor* has been expanded to 5,500 square feet, the largest in the Carnival fleet. It includes a delightfully refreshing water-spray park (parents seem to enjoy this as well).

DINING OPTIONS Each ship has a pair of two-story main restaurants, styled in keeping with each ship's theme. On the *Conquest,* a monumental sunflower marking the entrance to the Monet Restaurant is by the Murano glass artist Luciano Vistosi, while the artwork in the Renoir Restaurant is inspired by the cafe scene in the painting *Lunch at the Restaurant Fournaise.* On the *Valor,* the Washington and Lincoln dining rooms won't win any design awards; described by the line as "contemporary colonial," what oddly dominates the decor are bright peach-colored walls . . . hmmm. As Heidi's husband is fond of saying, "You can't eat ambience." Well, then, bring out the lobster. You'll see broiled tail on the menu once a cruise, and there are six desserts nightly. Low-fat, low-calorie, low-salt Spa Carnival Fare, vegetarian dishes, and children's selections are available.

The Conquest-class ships borrow the by-reservation supper club from the Spirit-class ships. The venue serves USDA prime aged steaks, fish, and other deluxe items for a $30-per-person cover charge. On the Spirit ships, the club sits under a glass portion of the ship's funnel for a more dramatic setting, but the Conquest ships' room has low ceilings and a more intimate feel. The best food and most refined service on board are here, where dinner is meant to stretch over several hours and several bottles of wine (for which there's an extra charge). Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served in the two-story restaurant on the Lido Deck, where you'll also find a 24-hour pizza counter (the mushroom-and-goat-cheese pies are scrumptious). Separate buffet lines (more than on the Destiny ships, to alleviate crowding) are devoted to Asian and American dishes, deli sandwiches, salads, and desserts. A new concept (on the upper level) on select Conquest class ships is Sur Mer: Carnival modestly describes this as a fish and chips shop, but the choices include such goodies as calamari, lobster salad, and bouillabaisse (other ships feature a rotisserie with broiled meats and traditional side dishes). There's no charge here or for the stand-up sushi bar down on the main promenade, but the pastries, cakes, and specialty coffees at the patisserie cost a couple of bucks each.

There's also 24-hour room service with new menus that include items such as a chicken fajita with greens and guacamole in a jalapeño-and-tomato wrap, plus the standard tuna salad, cookies, fruit, and so on.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The ships' four swimming pools include the main pool, with its two huge hot tubs, a stage for live (and reallllllly loud) reggae and calypso music, and a giant movie screen for blaring videos and ship events. This space is where all the action (and noise) of pool games plus the occasional outbreak of line dancing occurs. (Anyone for the Electric Slide?) Carnival's trademark twisty slide shoots into a pool one deck up. The aft pool, covered by a retractable glass dome, usually provides a more restful setting, although the pizzeria and burger grill are here (along with two more oversize hot tubs). The fourth pool is a really basic one for kiddies outside the playroom. A new feature on *Carnival Splendor* is the retractable dome over the midships pool, which is open or shut depending on the weather.

The ships' 14,500-square-foot health club and salon, with neat his-and-hers ocean-view steam and sauna rooms, perches high on Deck 11. Though the decor is a real yawner—it's as though Farcus simply forgot about the waiting area and locker room—you'll find today's latest treatments available, from hot stone massages to hair and scalp massages. The spa is run by Steiner, the company that controls most cruise ship spas, so expect a superhard sell for products right after your treatment. One more pet peeve: You won't find a hair dryer, Q-tips, cotton balls, or any other amenities in the locker room—it's unabashedly no frills. On the fitness side, you'll find the nontrendy aerobics classes offered for free (such as stretching and step), and the cool stuff everyone wants to do, such as Pilates and spinning, going for $10 a class. There's a hot tub that sits in a glass-enclosed space jutting into the fitness room.

The Cloud 9 Spa on *Carnival Splendor* is huge by comparison, measuring 21,000 square feet. With 17 private rooms, there are all sorts of "European-style" treatments offered, plus an elaborate thermal suite and thalassotherapy pool. Right next to the spa is Serenity, an adults-only getaway with two very large whirlpools, oversized umbrellas, and lots of comfy chaise longues and sofas.

The jogging track loops above an open deck so that no cabins underneath get pounded.

The Spirit Class: Carnival Spirit • Pride • Legend • Miracle

The Verdict

Bright and fun with multistory dining and entertainment venues and a reservations-only restaurant, the Spirit ships offer everything you'll need, but packaged in a more sane size than the larger Destiny- and Conquest-class ships.

Carnival Spirit *(photo: Gero Mylius, Indav Ltd.)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	88,500	Year Launched	
Passengers (double occ.)	2,124	*Spirit*	2001
Passenger/Space Ratio	41.7	*Pride*	2001
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	1,062/682	*Legend*	2002
Crew	930	*Miracle*	2004
Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.3 to 1	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	2008

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	5	Dining Options	4
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4
Public Comfort/Space	4	Children's Facilities	4
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	4

When the $375-million Carnival *Spirit* debuted in April 2001, she ushered in a new class for the fun-ship line. Bigger than Carnival's eight Fantasy-class ships and smaller than its three Destiny-class vessels, the 2,124-passenger, 88,500-ton, 960-foot *Spirit, Pride, Legend,* and *Miracle* update Carnival's rubber-stamp style with a handful of innovations and more elegance, placing them closer to the newest Royal Caribbean and Princess vessels than to Carnival's earlier Fun Ships. The Spirit ships eliminate the cluster of nightclubs in favor of stretching the music venues from bow to stern on Decks 2 and 3, and there's an appealing supper club, which the subsequent Conquest class has also adopted. A state-of-the-art "teleradiology" system enables the ship's doctors to digitally transmit X-rays and other patient information to medical facilities on shore for consultation on a broad range of medical situations.

Interestingly, the Spirit-class ships bear more than a little resemblance to Costa's *Costa Atlantica* and newer sister *Mediterranea:* Their hull and superstructure were built from identical plans, and Carnival design guru Joe Farcus did the decor for them all.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$67	185	yes	yes	some	yes
Outside	$84	185	yes	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$166	275–300	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS The Spirit-class ships have verandas on more than 60% of their cabins, though most are pretty small, with a wood-tone plastic chair, a small table, and a deck chair. (Cabins with larger balconies are amidships and aft on decks 6, 7, and 8.) Their 213 inside cabins and outsides without balconies are a roomy 185 square feet (standard outsides with balconies are the same size plus a 40-sq.-ft. balcony). Of the 44 category-11 suites, most measure 275 square feet, plus an 85-square-foot balcony, while 10 located at the stern of Decks 4 through 8 measure 245 square feet, plus a jumbo wraparound 220-square-foot balcony. The six category-12 suites measure 300 square feet, plus a 115-square-foot balcony. On Deck 4, all category-5A cabins have lifeboats obstructing the view, though they do have sliding-glass doors that allow you to lean out into the fresh air.

In a subtle departure from the minimalist, somewhat cold cabin decor of the rest of Carnival's older ships, the *Spirit*'s cabins are warmer and more sophisticated, with toasted-caramel wood-tone furniture and mango- and coral-hued upholstery, drapes, and bedspreads. The pointy lighting fixtures are more stylish but don't throw a lot of light on the desk mirror. Also, there are none of those great little reading lights over the beds like the rest of the fleet offers, just lamps on the night tables.

All cabins, even the least expensive inside ones, have a decent amount of storage space in both closets and drawers (with small leather handles that some people find difficult to grab hold of), plus a safe, TV, desk and stool, chair, well-designed bathroom with a shower stall that is a tad larger than that on other ships, and glass shelves on either side of the large mirror to stash your toiletries. Just about all cabins have a small sitting area with a sofa and coffee table (some insides have only a chair and table), and all have a real hair dryer (stored in the desk/vanity drawer). Like the rest of the fleet, all beds are outfitted with new extrathick and comfy mattresses, duvets, linens, and pillows, and you'll enjoy the thick and fluffy towels and bathrobes, too.

There are 16 cabins for passengers with disabilities.

PUBLIC AREAS Carnival designer Joe Farcus works his whimsy once again aboard the Spirit-class ships, blending marble, wood-veneer walls, tile mosaic work, buttery leathers, rich fabrics, copper and bronze, Art Nouveau and Art Deco themes, and all manner of glass lighting fixtures. Though a relatively subdued bronze color scheme defines many public areas, these ships still are glitzy and blinding in the same fun Vegas way as the rest of the Carnival fleet.

A string trio or pianist performs throughout the day at the lower-level lobby bar that anchors each ship's spectacular, jaw-dropping, nine-deck atrium, even more of a central hub than aboard earlier Carnival ships owing to its placement amidships. Just about all the indoor action is on Decks 2 and 3, where you'll find the piano bar (on *Spirit,* it's a neat Oriental-style spot with carved rosewood detailing, paper-lantern lighting fixtures, a red lacquer piano, and rich Chinese silk walls; on *Legend,* it's an understated tribute to Billie Holiday in stainless steel), large sports bar, disco, jazz nightclub (where karaoke and other contests are held), cafe (where you can purchase specialty coffees and pastries), combination library and Internet center (with a ridiculously sparse book collection), elegant string of shops, modern-style wedding chapel, and a sprawling photo gallery. The low-ceilinged lounge tucked into the bow on Deck 1, at the end of a corridor of cabins, is so well hidden it's often empty.

The three-level showrooms are something to see; on *Spirit,* Farcus had Verdi's Egypt-themed opera *Aida* in mind when he covered it head to toe in brightly painted gold-and-blue King Tut–style sarcophagi and hieroglyphics (on the *Legend,* it's a flashy

Mediterranean-style movie palace). Sightlines are severely limited from parts of the Deck 2 and Deck 3 levels, so arrive early if you want a decent view. The disco is a two-story barrel-shaped place with a giant video wall; on *Spirit,* the funky spot has a Jackson Pollock–inspired splatter-painted design. On the *Miracle,* the disco was made to look like a Gothic castle in ruins with faux stone walls.

The ships' broad outdoor promenade is wonderfully nostalgic (almost), but unfortunately does not wrap around the entire ship; near the bow you are channeled through a door and the promenade suddenly (and oddly) becomes enclosed and narrower, turning into a cute but kind of odd jungle-themed area lined with comfy chairs and small tables with views through jumbo-size portholes. The kids' playroom and a video arcade are tucked away in the far forward reaches of the bow on decks 4 and 5. Playrooms are divided into three sections connected via tunnels and offer sand art, a candy-making machine, a computer lab with a handful of iMacs and PlayStations, and other diversions. They're of decent size, but nowhere near the size and scope of what you'll find on the Splendor- and Conquest-class fleetmates or on Royal Caribbean's Oasis-, Freedom-, Voyager-, and Radiance-class ships and Disney's *Magic* and *Wonder.* The video arcade is huge, with 30-plus machines, including air hockey and foosball.

DINING OPTIONS Unlike most of the fleet, the Spirit ships have one sprawling, two-story, 1,300-seat formal dining room (offering the traditional early and late seating). They're pleasant places to dine, especially if you can snag an intimate booth or a table along the glass railing on the second level, with views of the scene below. The Spirit ships were the first in the Carnival fleet to also offer an alternative reservations-only restaurant for more intimate and elegant dining from a menu of mostly steaks and seafood, for a cover charge of $30 per person. The newer Conquest class also has them. Main drawback on the Spirit class: Rowdy crowd noise sometimes filters up from the atrium bar below. In the huge, well-laid-out indoor/outdoor casual buffet restaurant, menu items range from standard American to French, Italian, and Asian; sushi is offered in the buffet restaurant at lunch. The food is fine, but don't expect anything resembling gourmet.

As aboard the rest of the fleet, 24-hour pizza and Caesar salad are offered from a counter in the buffet restaurant. You can get a tasty deli sandwich from the New York Deli all day long, and self-serve frozen yogurt and soft ice cream are also on hand.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The Spirit-class spas are the only ones in the fleet to have any decor to speak of; the rest have had a bland, institutional look, as though Farcus forgot to design them. The *Spirit,* for instance, sports a Greek-inspired motif of white fluted columns and images of Greek gods on the walls. The multilevel gyms are based loosely on a Greek amphitheater, and though they're more than adequate, with dozens of machines, they're a bit more cramped than the huge spaces on the Conquest- and Destiny-class ships.

In general, there are lots of places for sunbathing across the three topmost decks, including the area around the two main pools amidships on the Lido Deck, as well as around a third pool on the aft end of this deck. All told, there are four hot tubs (including one in the gym), plus a jogging track, combination volleyball/basketball court, and shuffleboard. A fun, snaking water slide for kids and adults is sequestered high up and aft on a top deck, and adjacent is a small, sort of forlorn, fenced-in kids' wading pool. With no shade up on this part of the ship, don't forget to put sunscreen on your kids' delicate skin—and your own, for that matter.

The Destiny Class: Carnival Destiny • Triumph • Victory

The Verdict

These three behemoths capture the classic Carnival whimsy, though with a somewhat mellower color scheme than the line's older ships—but let's not split hairs, they're still bright.

Carnival Destiny *(photo: Carnival Cruise Lines)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)		*Destiny*	1,321/480
Destiny	101,353	*Triumph/Victory*	1,379/508
Triumph/Victory	102,000	Crew	1,000
Passengers (double occ.)		Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.6 to 1
Destiny	2,642	Year Launched	
Triumph/Victory	2,758	*Destiny*	1996
Passenger/Space Ratio		*Triumph*	1999
Destiny	38.4	*Victory*	2000
Triumph/Victory	37	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins		*Destiny/Triumph/Victory*	2008

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

★★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	5	Dining Options	3.5
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	5
Public Comfort/Space	4.5	Children's Facilities	4
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	4.5

Taller than the Statue of Liberty, these 13-deck ships cost $400 million to $440 million apiece and carry 2,642 passengers based on double occupancy and 3,400-and-change with every additional berth filled (and some cruises do indeed carry a full load). All three are nearly identical, though *Triumph* and *Victory* are a tad larger than *Destiny* (having an additional deck at top) and are reconfigured in a few minor ways. *Destiny* was the first cruise ship ever built to exceed 100,000 tons, and her sheer size and spaciousness inspired the cruise industry to build more in this league. In late 2005, the *Destiny* received a healthy multimillion-dollar face-lift that took 3 weeks and included the addition of a new teen club, renovated Lido buffet restaurant, vamped-up children's pool, redesigned casino, and spruced-up suites. All three ships now sport a giant video screen up on the Pool Deck.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$56	185	no	yes	no	yes
Outside	$70	185–220	no	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$164	275–345	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS The Destiny-class sisters, along with the new Conquest-class ships, have the line's biggest standard outside cabins, with the category-6A and -6B cabins (which take up most of the Riviera and Main decks) measuring 220 square feet (and that's not including the balcony); the rest of the fleet's standard outsides measure 185 square feet—still very roomy. If that's not enough, more than 60% of the *Destiny* sisters' outside cabins (480–508 of them) have sitting areas and private balconies. That's compared to a paltry 54 private verandas out of 618 outside cabins on Carnival's Fantasy-class ships. In 2008, outside cabins on the *Destiny* and *Triumph* were retrofitted with private balconies, creating a total of 48 additional 230-square-foot veranda staterooms on both these ships.

There are two categories of suites: Veranda Suites measuring 275 square feet, plus a 65-square-foot balcony; and Penthouse Suites, where you can live like a king with 345 square feet, plus an 85-square-foot balcony. Both are located on Deck 7, smackdab in the middle of the ship; both kinds of suites were upgraded in late 2005 with updated bathrooms, carpeting, and wall coverings. All cabins have new bed sarongs (replacing quilts), curtains and fabrics. Specially designed family staterooms, at a comfortable but not roomy 230 square feet, are located convenient to children's facilities, and many of them can be connected to the stateroom next door. All standard cabins have a TV, safe, hair dryer, desk, dresser, chair and stool, bathroom with shower, and Carnival's great bedding system, featuring extrathick mattresses, duvets, linens, and pillows, along with fluffy towels and bathrobes.

A total of 25 cabins on *Destiny,* 27 on *Triumph,* and 30 on *Victory* are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS At the time these ships were designed, Carnival interior designer Joe Farcus never had so much public space to play with, and he took full advantage. The ships are dominated by staggering nine-deck atria with casual bars on the ground level, and the three-deck-high showrooms are a sight—*Destiny*'s was the first of this magnitude on any cruise ship, and subsequent models tread a fine line between outrageous and relatively tasteful: for example, *Triumph*'s wacko chandelier, which looks like DNA strands made from crystal golf balls, topped with little Alice-in-Wonderland candleholders. The ships' mondo casinos span some 9,000 square feet and feature more than 300 slot machines and about two dozen gaming tables. The *Destiny*'s casino was refurbished in late 2005, along with just about all the other public rooms on that ship.

Many of the ships' 12-plus bars and entertainment venues are located along the bustling main drag of the Promenade Deck. The Sports Bar on each ship boasts multiple TV monitors projecting different sporting events. Each ship has a wine bar, a cappuccino cafe, and a piano bar, which aboard *Triumph* is a bizarre New Orleans–themed place called the Big Easy, sporting thousands of real oyster shells covering its walls (collected from New Orleans's famous Acme Oyster House—only on Carnival!). Each also has a sprawling disco with a wild decor: On *Victory,* an Arctic motif features black faux-fur bar stools, while *Triumph*'s decor is a little more reserved, with goofy little Barney-purple chairs, and glass panels and tubes filled with bubbling water throughout. One deck below is an elegant lounge for a drink or a cigar: On *Triumph,* it's a clubby place called the Oxford Bar, with dark-wood paneling, leather furniture, and gilded picture frames (too bad you can hear the disco music pounding above late at night). The ships' Internet centers are adjacent to this lounge.

Each ship has several shopping boutiques, a spacious beauty salon, a library, a card room, and a fairly large children's playroom and video arcade. In late 2005, a teen club

was added to the *Destiny,* and it comes decked out with a dance floor, high-tech sound/light system, three large-screen plasma TVs, music listening stations, video game pods, and a soft-drink bar.

DINING OPTIONS Each ship has a pair of two-level dining rooms with ocean views from both the main floor and the mezzanine level, as well as a two-story indoor/outdoor casual buffet restaurant (which was recently refurbished on the *Destiny*) that includes two specialty food stations that make Asian stir-fry and deli-style sandwiches to order; sushi is also served in the buffet restaurant at lunch. There's also a grill section for burgers, fries, and kielbasa-size hot dogs, a salad bar, and a dessert island. Specialty coffee bars and patisseries sell gourmet goodies for a few bucks a pop.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES Along with the Conquest-class ships, the Destiny-class facilities are the most generous among the Carnival vessels, with four pools (including a kids' wading pool); seven hot tubs; and a 214-foot, two-deck-high, corkscrew-shaped water slide.

The tiered, arena-style decks of the sprawling midships Lido Deck pool area provide optimal viewing of the band and stage, pool games, and all the hubbub that happens in this frenetically busy part of the ship. All three ships now also have a giant video screen up on deck. Along with two hot tubs, *Destiny* has swim-up bars at two of its main pools; *Triumph* and *Victory* eliminated the swim-up bars in exchange for more deck space, larger pools, and the addition of a wading area a few inches deep surrounding the pools. Unfortunately, this area can be very difficult to get across, due to a lack of obvious "corridors" through all the deck chairs. The aft pool area on all three ships features two hot tubs and a retractable roof that covers all, enabling deck activities and entertainment to continue even in rainy weather. On *Triumph* and *Victory,* the big stage adjacent to the Main Continent pool is even bigger than the one on *Destiny,* and it has been reconfigured to provide more space for guests at deck parties, and to make the Pool Deck more open and visually appealing. Another modification is the placement of a small performance stage aft on the Lido Deck near the New World pool.

Even though the ships' huge gyms aren't as large as those on Royal Caribbean's Voyager class, Carnival's are much roomier and actually feel bigger. The two-deck-high spa and fitness centers feature more than 30 state-of-the-art exercise machines, including virtual-reality stationary bikes. There are men's and women's saunas and steam rooms, and a pair of hot tubs. Spas offer all the latest treatments (at the latest high prices), but as on all Carnival ships (except for the newer Spirit class), they're surprisingly drab, and the only place to wait for your masseuse is on a cold, high-school-locker-room bench, wrapped in a towel—no robes are provided (unless, supposedly, you ask for one). So much for ambience. There are separate aerobics rooms (though they're smaller than they used to be, as half the space was snapped up to create a teen room a few years back).

The well-stocked 1,300-square-foot indoor/outdoor children's play center has its own pool and is nicely sequestered on a top deck, out of the fray of the main Pool Deck areas. The ships also have virtual-reality video arcades that promise hours of fun.

The Fantasy Class: Carnival Fantasy • Ecstasy • Sensation • Fascination • Imagination • Inspiration • Elation • Paradise

Carnival Fantasy *(photo: Carnival Cruise Lines)*

The Verdict

These time-tested favorites are the line's original megas, and their whimsical decor and endless entertainment and activities spell excitement from the get-go—though they do feel outdated compared to Carnival's newer classes.

Specifications

Size (in tons)	70,367	*Inspiration*	1996
Passengers (double occ.)	2,040	*Elation*	1998
Passenger/Space Ratio	34.5	*Paradise*	1998
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	1,020/54	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Crew	920	*Fantasy*	2008
Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.2 to 1	*Ecstasy*	2007
Year Launched		*Sensation*	2008
Fantasy	1990	*Fascination*	2007
Ecstasy	1991	*Imagination*	2008
Sensation	1993	*Inspiration*	2008
Fascination	1994	*Elation*	2006
Imagination	1995	*Paradise*	2008/09

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	3
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	3.5
Public Comfort/Space	4	Children's Facilities	4
Decor	3.5	Enjoyment Factor	4

These Fun Ships and their risqué names offer a successful combination of hands-on fun and a glamorous, fantasyland decor, with acres of teak decking plus all the diversions, distractions, and entertainment options for which Carnival is famous. They really are fun! (Or are they cheesy? It's such a fine line.) Each was built on the same cookie-cutter design at Finland's Kvaerner Masa shipyard (at a cost of $225 million–$300 million each . . . a bargain compared to the $500-million price tag of a new ship today), and they are nearly identical in size, profile, and onboard amenities, with different decorative themes. These ships have been run hard and they look a bit worn out compared to their newer fleetmates, but you won't notice a thing after a couple of Carnival Fun Ship drink specials!

From the first ship of the series *(Fantasy)* to the last *(Paradise),* the ships' decor evolved toward a relatively mellow state (note, *relatively*). *Fantasy* features a Roman-themed entertainment promenade inspired (loosely, of course) by the ancient city of Pompeii, with a faux-stone floor, terra-cotta urns, Doric columns, and electric torches—but where's the flowing lava? In late 2003, the ship underwent its first major refurbishment, which included a brand-new atrium bar (like the ones on the *Elation* and all newer ships), completely overhauled cabins, a redesigned promenade, and new carpeting and wall coverings throughout much of the other areas.

Ecstasy follows a city-at-sea theme, with no shortage of neon-metallic skyscraper imagery. *Fascination* is big on flashy fantasy, with a retina-shattering chrome atrium and a heavy Broadway and Hollywood theme, while *Sensation* avoids obvious razzle-dazzle in favor of artwork enhanced with ultraviolet lighting, sound, and color. Aboard *Imagination,* miles of fiber-optic cable make the mythical and classical artwork glow in ways the Greek, Roman, and Assyrian designers of the originals never would have imagined. *Inspiration* was reportedly inspired by artists such as Toulouse-Lautrec and Fabergé, and architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright—though in a . . . brighter style. You'll find a Greek mythology theme on the *Elation* that's all about Carnival-style "classic" columns, flutes, and harps, while the *Paradise* pays tribute to classic ocean liners. The newest of the Fantasy-class ships—the *Paradise* and the *Elation*—sport a few improvements over their sisters, including an expanded kids' playroom and the hublike atrium bar. The *Sensation* added an atrium bar a few years back. By the way, the *Paradise,* touted as the line's only completely nonsmoking ship when she debuted in 1998, changed its policies in late 2004; you can now light up in designated areas, just like on the rest of the fleet.

The Fantasy-class ships are in the midst of a multimillion-dollar face-lift that has added, or will soon add, an expanded children's water park, the creation of the Serenity adults-only deck area, flatscreen televisions in staterooms, 98 more cabin balconies, a new Circle C facility for the 12- to 14-year olds, new atrium lobby bar and new coffee bar, and a 9-hole miniature golf course. By early 2009, *Sensation, Imagination, Inspiration,* and *Fantasy* had received the upgrades, with the other four due to get them in the next few years.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$44	185	no	no	no	yes
Outside	$57	185	no	no	no	yes
Suite	$153	330	yes	no	yes	yes

CABINS Accommodations range from lower-deck inside cabins with upper and lower berths to large suites with verandas, king-size beds, sitting areas, and balconies. Standard cabins are roomy (at least 185 sq. ft.) and minimalist in design, with stained-oak trim accents and conventional, monochromatic colors such as salmon red—subdued compared to the flamboyance of the public areas. The cabins are not big on personality but are functional and well laid out. There are 26 demisuites and 28 suites, all with private verandas. The 28 330-square-foot suites each have a whirlpool tub and shower, an L-shaped sofa that converts into a foldaway bed, a safe, a minibar, a walk-in closet, and sliding-glass doors leading to a 70-square-foot private balcony; they are

positioned midway between stern and bow, on a middle deck subject to the least tossing and rocking during rough weather.

All cabins, even the least expensive inside ones, have enough storage space to accommodate a reasonably diverse wardrobe, and feature a safe, TV, desk and stool, chair, reading lights for each bed, and bathroom with a roomy shower and generous-size mirrored cabinet to store your toiletries. All cabins have Carnival's great new extrathick mattresses, duvets, linens, and pillows, along with fluffy towels and bathrobes. In early 2006, all of the *Ecstasy*'s cabins were completely refurbished, and by early 2009, cabins and suites on the *Sensation, Imagination, Inspiration,* and *Fantasy* were upgraded.

About 20 cabins on each ship are suitable for passengers with disabilities.

DINING OPTIONS In addition to a pair of big one-story dining rooms with windows, there's a large indoor/outdoor casual buffet restaurant (which was recently spruced up on the *Ecstasy*). You'll also find specialty coffee bars and patisseries selling gourmet goodies for a couple of bucks a pop. There's a complimentary sushi bar serving fresh, tasty sushi in late afternoons on all but the *Sensation,* with sake available for an extra charge.

PUBLIC AREAS Each ship boasts the same configuration of decks, public lounges, and entertainment venues, including a six-story atrium flanked by glass-sided elevators, casinos, Internet centers, and at least eight bars, plus several (usually packed) hot tubs. The cluster of disappointing shops on each ship is surprisingly cramped and won't be winning any design awards; it's much better on the newer ships.

In the next few years, all Fantasy ships will have new 9-hole miniature golf courses and new children's play areas.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES Although totally blah in the decor department, the 12,000-square-foot spas and fitness areas are well-enough equipped. Each has a roomy, mirrored aerobics room and a large, windowed gym with more than a dozen workout machines plus free weights. Each has men's and women's locker rooms and massage rooms (both areas surprisingly drab and institutional feeling), as well as a sauna and steam room, whirlpools, and three swimming pools, one of which has a spiraling water slide. The spa area on the *Sensation* was renovated in early 2006. The Sun Deck of each ship offers an unobstructed ⅛-mile jogging track covered with a rubberized surface. Both the spas and the gyms aboard the *Imagination* and *Inspiration* were updated in late 2007.

3 Celebrity Cruises

1050 Caribbean Way, Miami, FL 33132. ✆ **800/437-3111** or 305/539-6000. Fax 800/722-5329. www.celebrity.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL Celebrity is the most stylish of the mainstream lines, operating big megaships spiced up with above-average service, a certain elegance, and a cutting-edge sense of design and style. **Sails to:** Alaska, Caribbean, The Bahamas, Bermuda, Canada/New England, Hawaii, the Pacific Northwest, Panama Canal (plus Europe, Australia/New Zealand, South America, Galapagos, transatlantic).

THE EXPERIENCE Celebrity juices up the mainstream cruise experience with a touch of refinement and a dash of class, all while keeping things fun, active, and within the price range of Joe and Sally Cruiser. Each ship is spacious, glamorous, and

comfortable, mixing sleekly modern and Art Deco styles and throwing in cutting-edge art collections to boot. The new Solstice-class ships are the most elegant megaships in the cruise world.

An exceedingly polite and professional staff contributes greatly to the overall mood. Dining-wise, the dashing alternative restaurants on the line's Millennium-class ships outclass all other mainstream ship restaurants for presentation and gorgeous decor, and match the best for cuisine.

Like all the big-ship lines, Celebrity offers lots for its passengers to do, though its focus stays mainly on mellower pursuits such as bridge, spelling bees, darts challenges, and expert-led seminars on such topics as wildlife, astronomy, music, maritime history, health and wellness, and various how-to topics. The line's spas are among the most attractive at sea, decor shipwide is the most original, and the art collections are the most compelling you'll find on any cruise ships, anywhere.

Pros

- **Best mainstream alternative restaurants at sea:** The Millennium-class ships offer remarkable service, food, and wine in their classy alternative venues, whose elegant decor incorporates artifacts from cherished old ocean liners like the *Olympic, Normandie,* and SS *United States.*
- **Spectacular spas:** Beautiful and well equipped, they're some of the best at sea.
- **Contemporary art:** Celebrity's ships are the only ones in the cruise biz that can really be said to have world-class, museum-quality art collections, concentrating on modern and contemporary works. (See "The Best Art at Sea," below).

Cons

- **Nickel-and-diming:** Though almost all cruise lines now supplement their income by offering extracharge alternative restaurants, fancy coffee drinks, specialty ice creams, and the like, Celebrity's high-toned image means the line's passengers get more ticked off by this kind of nickel-and-diming. For instance, passengers we polled on one recent Caribbean cruise were uniformly outraged by the $30 bingo charge.

CELEBRITY: MEGACHIC

Celebrity's roots go back to the powerful Greek shipping family Chandris, whose patriarch founded a cargo shipping company in 1915. The family expanded into the cruise business in the late 1960s and by 1976 had the largest cruise fleet in the world. In the late 1970s, they introduced the down-market Chandris-Fantasy Cruises, which served a mostly European clientele. In 1989, the Chandris family dissolved Fantasy and created Celebrity Cruises, building beautiful, innovative ships that were immediately recognizable by their crisp navy-blue-and-white hulls and their rakishly angled funnels decorated with a giant X—which was really the Greek letter *chi,* for Chandris. The company's rise to prominence was so rapid and so successful that in 1997 it was courted and acquired by the larger and wealthier Royal Caribbean Cruises, Ltd., which now operates Celebrity as a sister line to Royal Caribbean International. Celebrity, in turn, is parent company to **Azamara Cruises** (p. 93), which operates smaller vessels with a more adults-only vibe.

In 2008, Celebrity introduced the first of its new generation of 118,000-ton, 2,850-passenger megaships, *Solstice*—the loveliest new ship to debut in years. Sister

Compared with the other mainstream lines, here's how Celebrity rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor					✓
Dining				✓	
Activities				✓	
Children's Program			✓		
Entertainment			✓		
Service					✓
Worth the Money					✓

ship *Equinox* followed in summer 2009, and two more sisters are scheduled to follow: *Eclipse* in 2010 and an as-yet-unnamed sister in fall 2011.

PASSENGER PROFILE

Celebrity tries to focus on middle- to upper-middle-income cruisers and even wealthy patrons who want a great megaship experience (especially while nestled in one of the line's amazing Penthouse Suites), but its generally low prices—more or less comparable to those of Carnival and Royal Caribbean—ensure the demographic stays democratically wider. Clients who choose their cruise based on more than just price like Celebrity because it offers a well-balanced cruise, with lots of activities and a glamorous, exciting atmosphere that's both refined and fun.

Most passengers are couples in their 40s and up, though you'll see passengers of all ages, with a decent number of honeymooners and couples celebrating anniversaries, as well as families with children in summer and during the holidays.

DINING

TRADITIONAL Though Celebrity started out with a rep for truly exceptional cuisine, today the dishes served in its main dining rooms are really more on par with mainstream peers Princess, Royal Caribbean, NCL, and Holland America. **Dining service,** however, remains excellent. Dinner menus are likely to feature entrees such as veal shank cooked in an aromatic tomato velouté with orange zest, served with risotto; broiled sliced tenderloin with béarnaise and Madeira sauces; and boneless chicken breast with bananas and ham, coated with coconut flakes and served with curry peanut sauce. At every meal, Celebrity also offers lighter "spa" fare whose calorie, fat, cholesterol, and sodium breakdowns are listed on the back of the menu. Vegetarians, meanwhile, can enjoy one of the few **dedicated vegetarian menus** offered in the cruise biz. It's available upon request and changes every night, with multiple appetizer and entree options. Celebrity offers a good wine list that includes a line of proprietary wines called **Celebrity Cruises Cellarmaster Selection,** available on board and also online, at **www.celebrityvineyards.com**.

SPECIALTY Cuisine, service, and ambience really shine at the Millennium-class ships' intimate alternative restaurants, each of which carries a $30-per-person cover charge and seats just over 100 passengers. Presentation is paramount: Decor is centered around artifacts from the historic passenger vessels that give the restaurants their names; there often seems to be more waitstaff than diners; Caesar salads and zabaglione are prepared table-side; maitre d's carve passengers' meat dishes with the

The Best Art at Sea

Celebrity has been known from the beginning for its art collections, which are so far beyond the cruise ship norm that they're in an entirely different league—truly museum quality where other lines' collections are mostly decorative at best, with a few standout pieces that provide marquee value.

The older Century-class ships were personally curated by a member of the Chandris family, and feature modern collections heavy on names from minimalism, pop art, and other movements from the '60s, '70s, and '80s. *Mercury* alone features works by Richard Serra, Dan Flavin, Richard Long, Roy Lichtenstein, and Robert Rauschenberg, plus an entire wall created for the ship by Sol LeWitt. The new Solstice-class ships feature exceedingly contemporary pieces from both up-and-coming and established artists, the latter including Damien Hirst, Ross Bleckner, John Baldessari, Robert Rauschenberg, and Alexander Calder. There's even a Picasso.

Free handheld **audio art tours** are available on all of the line's ships.

finesse of a concert pianist; and a selection of excellent French cheeses arrives at the end of the meal.

The new Solstice-class ships are the first where Celebrity has gone whole-hog into alternative dining. Each ship features four specialty restaurants in addition to the main restaurant and buffet. There's the **Tuscan Grille** for specialty steaks and pastas; **Silk Harvest,** an Asian restaurant, for a mix of Thai, Vietnamese, Japanese, and Chinese dishes; and **Murano,** a European-themed restaurant whose elaborate, multicourse meals follow the style of Celebrity's Millennium-class specialty restaurants, featuring tableside cooking, carving, and flambé. **Blu,** a restaurant for the exclusive use of passengers booked in the ships' AquaClass staterooms (plus suite guests based on availability) serves a menu that targets healthful ingredients and preparation without sacrificing taste.

Century offers its own version of the Murano restaurant.

CASUAL Breakfast and lunch in the buffet restaurants are on par with those of lines such as Royal Caribbean and Princess, and include such features as a **made-to-order pasta bar** and a **pizza station** serving very tasty pies. On most nights, the buffet space is transformed into the **Casual Dining Boulevard,** with waiters serving entrees such as pasta, gourmet pizzas, and chicken between about 6 and 9:30pm. Reservations are recommended, though if there's space, walk-ins are accepted, too. During dinnertime, Celebrity also offers a **sushi bar** in one section of the buffet restaurant, serving both appetizer-size portions and full meals.

The Solstice-class ships feature **Bistro on Five,** a casual, chic restaurant with a menu of specialty crepes, sandwiches, soups, salads, and comfort-food entrees. There's also **Café al Bacio & Gelateria,** an upscale coffeehouse serving specialty coffees, teas, fresh-baked pastries, traditional gelatos and Italian ices, and other desserts.

Aboard the Century- and Millennium-class ships, the **Cova Café** offers incredibly good croissants (for free) and specialty lattes and cappuccinos (not for free). Each Solstice- and Millennium-class ship also has an **AquaSpa Café** where you can get low-cal treats for lunch or dinner from noon to 8pm, including raw veggie platters, poached

salmon with asparagus tips, vegetarian sushi, and pretty salads with tuna or chicken. Spa breakfasts offer items such as bagels and lox, fresh fruit, cereal, and boiled eggs. For the opposite of spa cuisine, outdoor grills on all ships offer burgers and the like.

SNACKS & EXTRAS The line offers **afternoon tea** at least once per cruise fleetwide, with white-gloved waiters serving tea, finger sandwiches, scones, and desserts from rolling carts. An "after-theater" menu at each ship's coffee bar features sandwiches, savories, tartlets, hot brochettes, canapes, artisan cheeses, fresh fruit, crackers, petit fours, and napoleons from 11pm to closing. There's also an elaborate **brunch** in the main dining room once per cruise, featuring the kind of over-the-top spreads and ice, fruit, and vegetable carvings that used to be featured at midnight buffets.

The line's **room service** allows passengers to order off a limited menu 24 hours a day and also from the lunch and dinner menus during set meal hours. You can get tasty **pizza** delivered right to your cabin between 3 and 7pm and 10pm and 1am daily, in a box and pouch just like the ones used by your local pizzeria.

ACTIVITIES

Celebrity offers lots of options for those who want to stay active, but it also caters to those who want to veg.

Celebrity's **spas** are some of the best in the business, beautifully appointed and offering a nice raft of treatments, from the exotic to the everyday-but-it-still-feels-good. If you're looking for the latter, though, make it a point to ask: Often (as on its website), Celebrity tends to list its fancy, high-priced treatments but not its standard massages, facials, and pedicures. If you're the "try something new" type, the line offers its **Acupuncture at Sea program** fleetwide on all cruises, with professionals offering acupuncture and medicinal herbal treatments for pain management, smoking cessation, weight loss, stress management, and other ailments. Free talks on acupuncture and other holistic health treatments are also offered at various times throughout the cruise. In the gyms, various aerobic-type classes are available throughout the day. Basic classes are free, while the cool ones, such as **Pilates and yoga,** cost extra and can be booked only at a package price at the start of the cruise.

Other activities include wine tastings (for a fee), horse racing, bingo, bridge, art auctions, trivia games, game shows, arts and crafts, cooking demos, computer classes (from Web page design to the basics of Excel), and ballroom and line-dancing lessons. Up to four featured guests also sail on every cruise, offering **complimentary enrichment lectures.** Speakers may include naturalists (on Alaska, Hawaii, and South America sailings), caricature artists (on weeklong Caribbean and Bermuda sailings), chefs from well-regarded restaurants, and wine experts who offer onboard seminars and pre-dinner tastings. From time to time actors, politicians, and journalists also sail aboard and hold talks. Recent speakers included maritime historian and author John Maxtone Graham and actors Dick Van Patten and Rita Moreno.

All the ships have a well-equipped Internet center as well as Wi-Fi capability in various public areas, and all ships except *Mercury* offer Internet access in every cabin and suite for guests who bring their laptops. Interactive cabin TVs allow guests to order room service from on-screen menus, select the evening's wine in advance of dinner, play casino-style games, browse in virtual shops, and order pay-per-view movies.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

Celebrity pampers kids as well as adults, especially during the summer months and holidays when its Caribbean- and Bermuda-bound ships typically carry 400-plus children.

Each ship has a dedicated youth staff of six or more supervising playroom activities practically all day long, and private and group babysitting is available in the evenings.

During kid-intensive seasons, **supervised activities** are geared toward four age groups within ages 3 to 17. Kids ages 3 to 6, dubbed "Ship Mates," can enjoy treasure hunts, clown parties, T-shirt painting, dancing, movies, ship tours, and ice-cream-sundae-making parties. "Cadets," ages 7 to 9, have T-shirt painting, scavenger hunts, board games, arts and crafts, ship tours, and computer games. Your 10- to 12-year-old may want to join the "Ensign" activities, such as karaoke, computer games, board games, trivia contests, arts and crafts, movies, and pizza parties. In summer, these three age groups put on summer-stock theater presentations, with Ship Mates and Cadets singing, dancing, and acting, and Ensigns directing and producing. There are also masquerade parties where Ship Mates and Cadets make their own masks and then parade around the ship, and Junior Olympics where the whole family is encouraged to cheer on the kids who compete in relay races, diving, and basketball free throws. Various activities and tours give kids a behind-the-scenes look at the ship's entertainment, food and beverage, and hotel departments.

Toddlers under age 3 can participate in activities and use the playroom if accompanied by a parent.

For **teens** ages 13 to 17 (subdivided into two groups, 13–15 and 16–17), the Celebrity ships have attractive teen discos/hangout rooms with Xbox, Nintendo Wii, and PlayStation, and activities such as talent shows, karaoke, pool games, and trivia contests.

Group babysitting in the playroom ($6 per child, per hr.) is available for ages 3 to 12 between noon and 2pm on port days, and every evening from 10pm to 1am. Kids can dine with the counselors most nights between 5 and 7pm (free on sea days; $6 per child, per hr., on port days). A **V.I.P. Party Pass** covers all group babysitting for your cruise at a 40% discount, and kids get to attend one big-screen movie, with free popcorn and refreshments, behind-the-scenes tours, and souvenirs. Prices vary by itinerary. On the last night of the cruise, a complimentary **Parents' Night Out party** is offered between 5pm and 1am, and includes pizza and fun activities for kids while their parents step out. Female crewmembers offer evening **private in-cabin babysitting** on a limited basis, for $8 per hour for up to two children. Kids must be at least 6 months old, and the service must be requested 24 hours in advance.

There is no **minimum age** for sailing.

ENTERTAINMENT

Celebrity offers all the popular cruise favorites, such as magicians, comedians, cabaret acts, passenger talent shows, and Broadway-style musical revues. Overall quality of music and comedy acts is good, but on our last sailing the musical revues were poor. For something a little different, the line offers some nice, understated entertainment touches such as **harpists, string quartets,** and **roving a cappella groups** performing in various lounges.

All the ships also have cozy lounges and bars where you can retreat for a romantic nightcap and some music, from laid-back jazz to music from the big-band era, spiced with interpretations of contemporary hits. There are also the elegant and plush **Michael's Club** piano lounges for cordials and some quiet conversation, and **casinos** for loud, jangly conversation. Each ship has late-night disco dancing, usually until about 3am. You'll also find karaoke and recent-release movies in the ship theaters and cinemas.

Celebrity Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Century	**Bahamas:** 2-night r/t Miami (Jan). **Caribbean:** 4- & 5-night western, r/t Miami (year-round).
Constellation	**Caribbean:** 14-night southern, r/t Miami (Jan–Feb & Nov–Dec). **Panama Canal:** 13-, 14- & 15-night, east- and westbound between San Diego and Fort Lauderdale (Jan–Mar & Dec).
Eclipse	**Caribbean:** 5-night western, r/t Miami (Nov). 7-night eastern & western, r/t Miami (Nov–Dec).
Equinox	**Caribbean:** 10- & 11-night, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Jan–Apr & Nov–Dec).
Infinity	**Panama Canal:** 14-, 15- & 16-night eastbound & westbound between San Diego and Fort Lauderdale (Mar–Apr & Sept–Nov). **Alaska:** 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Seattle (May–Aug).
Mercury	**Caribbean:** 11-, 12- & 14-night eastern, r/t Baltimore (Jan–Feb & Oct–Dec). 10-night western & 11-night eastern, r/t Charleston, SC (Feb–Apr). **Bahamas:** 9- & 10-night, r/t Baltimore (Jan & Oct–Dec). **Alaska:** 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Vancouver (May–Sept). 13-night, Los Angeles to Vancouver (May). 12-night Vancouver to San Diego (Sept). **Panama Canal:** 17-night San Diego to Baltimore (Oct).
Millennium	**Caribbean:** 9-, 10- & 11-night southern, r/t San Juan (Jan–Apr & Nov–Dec). **Panama Canal:** 14-night westbound & eastbound between San Juan & San Diego (Apr & Sept). **Alaska:** 14-night San Diego to Vancouver (Apr). 7-night Gulf of Alaska, north- & southbound between Vancouver & Seward/Anchorage (May–Sept). **U.S. West Coast & British Columbia:** 10-night wine cruise, Vancouver to San Diego (Sept).
Solstice	**Caribbean:** 7-night eastern, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Jan–Nov). 7-night western, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Apr–Nov).
Summit	**Caribbean:** 7-night southern, r/t San Juan (Jan–Apr & Oct–Dec). **Bermuda:** 7-night, r/t Bayonne, NJ (Apr–Sept). **Canada/New England:** 7-night, r/t Bayonne, NJ (July–Aug). 14-night, r/t Bayonne (Sept–Oct).

SERVICE

Service is Celebrity's strongest suit, with staff uniformly polite, attentive, cheerful, knowledgeable, and professional. Stewards wear white gloves at embarkation as they escort passengers to their cabins. Waiters have a poised, upscale-hotel air about them, and their manner does much to create an elegant mood. There are very professional **sommeliers** in the dining room, and waiters are on hand in the Lido breakfast and lunch buffet restaurants to carry passengers' trays from the buffet line to a table of their choice. If you occupy a suite, you'll get a **tuxedo-clad personal butler** who serves afternoon tea, complimentary cappuccino and espresso, and complimentary pre-dinner hors d'oeuvres. If you ask, he'll also handle your laundry, shine your shoes, make sewing repairs, deliver messages, and even serve a full five-course dinner en suite or help you organize a cocktail party. (You foot the bill for food and drinks, of course.) Other hedonistic treats bestowed upon suite guests include a bottle of champagne on arrival, personalized stationery, terry robes, oversize bath towels, priority check-in and debarkation, express luggage delivery at embarkation, and so on. **ConciergeClass staterooms**—a middle zone between regular cabins and suites—offer some of the same perks but without the high price of actual suites (and no butler, sorry).

When it comes to **tipping,** Celebrity has gone the automatic route, adding a fee of $11.50 per person, per day to the accounts of guests in normal staterooms, with the figure going up to $12 per day for guests in ConciergeClass and AquaClass staterooms and $15 per day for guests in suites.

Laundry and dry-cleaning services are available fleetwide for a nominal fee, but there are no self-service laundry facilities.

The Solstice Class: Celebrity Solstice • Equinox • Eclipse (preview)

The Verdict

The most beautiful megaships at sea today, *Solstice* and *Equinox* manage to simultaneously encapsulate all that was great about Celebrity's older vessels while also moving logically and stylistically into the future.

Celebrity Solstice *(photo: Celebrity Cruises)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	122,000	Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.3 to 1
Passengers (double occ.)	2,850	Year Launched	
Passenger/Space Ratio	42.8	*Solstice*	2008
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	1,426/1,216	*Equinox*	2009
Crew	1,246	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	N/A

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	5	Dining Options	5
Appearance & Upkeep	5	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	5
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	4
Decor	5	Enjoyment Factor	5

Since introducing its very first newbuild in 1990, Celebrity has consistently had the most stylish megaships in the cruise biz, so it's gratifying to be able to say that the line's new Solstice-class ships are an absolute knockout. On the outside, their form is both massive and sleek, while inside a unifying aesthetic ties the many moods and experiences of their public rooms into a satisfying whole. The ships' overall look is an extension of that employed on Celebrity's older Century- and Millennium-class ships, with their neo-deco lines, minimalist art, and rich, quality textures and surfaces. In the atrium, translucent backlit onyx panels and white drapes recall similar materials used in the Millennium atriums, while the dreamy white interiors of each ship's main restaurant and observation lounge evoke both the past and the future—hinting at elements of the Century class while taking a stylistic swipe at both *2001: A Space Odyssey* and 1930s Hollywood movies. Balancing the "wow" is a wealth of subtle details, evident in everything from the ship's art collection—a world-class assemblage that amplifies the ship's mood with textural, minimalist, and nature-evoking pieces from big

names and emerging talents—to its cabins, which could win awards for innovation all by themselves.

Note: *Solstice* and *Equinox* are essentially identical, but because *Equinox* hadn't yet debuted at press time, all details in this review refer specifically to *Solstice.* A third sister ship, *Eclipse,* is slated to debut in 2010 and a fourth, still-unnamed sister will debut in fall 2011.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$126	183–200	yes	yes	yes	yes
Outside	$143	176–192	yes	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$338	300–1,291	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS When was the last time you got to your cabin, looked around, and thought, "Huh, why haven't other ships done that before?" It's the same-old same-old syndrome, created by one essential fact: There are only so many different ways to arrange things in rectangular boxes, and that's exactly what most cruise ship cabins are—premade modular units assembled in one place, trucked to the shipyard, and slotted into the new vessel like drawers in a dresser.

Celebrity broke the mold, changing the basic shape of its cabins so that one wall of each bulges slightly, interlocking with the cabin next door in a sort of squared-off yin-yang format. That simple change gives passengers more maneuvering room around the foot of the bed, but was accomplished without also having to increase the width of the cabin's open area—sizeable enough as is due to Celebrity's decision to make *Solstice*'s and *Equinox*'s cabins about 15% larger than those on its older ships.

Standard inside and outside cabins have an open and airy feeling, an ergonomic design, and a modern, modular look. Beds have rounded corners, allowing for better flow, and are higher than normal to give more storage space underneath. At the wall, the beds are surrounded by a tall headboard topped with a narrow, completely unobtrusive storage unit perfect for handbags, shopping bags, and other small items. Some couches offer trundle beds for kids and other additional guests, while closet doors slide shut automatically—which isn't so unusual on land, but is a hard thing to accomplish on a moving ship. Cabin bathrooms and showers are substantially larger and roomier than aboard most other megaships; showers are equipped with a foot rail that makes it easier for women to shave their legs; and there's an ingenious collection of small drawers, nooks, and cabinets for storing toiletries and other necessities. Outside, cabin balconies are large and deep, with plenty of room for two reclining deck chairs and a table.

In addition to the usual range of inside, outside, balcony cabins, and suites, *Solstice* and *Equinox* both offer 130 adults-only AquaClass staterooms, where the cabin experience is tied to an overall wellness aesthetic. Grouped together on Penthouse Deck, each AquaClass cabin offers niceties like large balconies, pillow menus, jetted body-wash showers, and special music/sound and aromatherapy options tied to specific vacation goals (relaxation, invigoration, and so on). AquaClass guests also get special perks around the ship, including unlimited access to the spa's Persian Garden aromatherapy steam room and relaxation room, special wellness classes and invitations to

VIP events, and the option of dining at a 130-seat specialty restaurant called Blu (see below).

Each ship has 30 wheelchair-accessible staterooms, spread among the different types of accommodations onboard, from inside cabins to sky suites.

PUBLIC AREAS The Solstice-class ships have one of the most logical arrangements of public rooms we've seen in a decade and a half of reviewing ships. Most are clustered on the Entertainment and Promenade decks, and rooms were consciously grouped by the designers so that different types are in different areas of the ship. Evening entertainment outlets, for instance (the Equinox Theatre and the several venues of the Entertainment Court), are all located forward and linked directly to the Sky Observation Lounge by elevator. Pre- and post-dinner entertainment (the Ensemble Lounge for pre-dinner cocktails and after-dinner jazz; Michael's Club for more intimate piano music and libations) is located immediately adjacent to the ships' specialty restaurants.

The 1,115-guest main theater is particularly innovative, its rounded stage and a complex ceiling rigging allowing aerialist entertainers to fly right over audience members' heads. Down the corridor, Celebrity Central is a 200-seat, multifunction venue that presents late-night comedy shows, films, and other shows and events. Across the hall, the Quasar nightclub has a streamlined, space-age look, with clear plastic "bubble chairs" suspended from the ceiling and huge LED screens curving from the walls into the ceiling, their lights synched with the music's beat. Between these two venues, an Entertainment Court is the venue for vocal quartets and other small-scale entertainment designed to keep passengers' interest as they move between other nightlife options. Other diversions on these decks include Cellar Masters, a Napa-inspired space for formal wine tastings and informal sipping; the Martini Bar with its cool color palette and a perpetually frosted bar; and Crush, a tasting room where guests sit around an ice-filled table to sample pairings of vodka and caviar.

But the Solstice-class ships' most distinctive and innovative features are out on deck—most visibly way up on the top deck, where the Lawn Club offers a half-acre of real grass growing 15 decks above the sea. A first for cruise ships, the area provides a country-club ambience: quiet, refined, and calming. In the central lawn, passengers can play croquet or putt some golf balls around, either in individual play or during scheduled tournaments, while two courts along the sides of the ship offer space for bocce and other lawn games. Passengers can also picnic on the main lawn, relax at the shaded patio at its aft end (dotted with potted greenery and comfortable lounge chairs and couches), or grab a drink at the aft-facing Sunset Bar, with its views of the ship's wake.

At the forward end of the club is another of *Solstice*'s signature features, the Hot Glass Show. Developed by the world-famous Corning Museum of Glass, it offers daily (and surprisingly high-energy) programs in which master artisans explain and demonstrate the art of glass-blowing. Presented in an open-air studio designed specifically for these ships, the shows give the audience a sort of "glassmaking 101" experience, taking them through the process of creating a piece from start to finish—from undifferentiated blob of glass to bowls, vases, and more complex forms like glass conch shells.

DINING OPTIONS Unlike Celebrity's older Millennium-class ships, which offer only a main restaurant, a reservations-only alternative, and a buffet, *Solstice* and *Equinox* are loaded with dining options, with four specialty restaurants and three light and casual options in addition to the main restaurant and the buffet. Four specialty restaurants are clustered aft on the Entertainment Deck, opening off the Ensemble Lounge. The Tuscan Grille is a high-style spot in the very stern, offering a menu heavy on steaks and pastas. Silk Harvest offers a mix of Thai, Vietnamese, Japanese, and Chinese selections, complemented by a variety of sakes, Asian-influenced martinis, and cocktails created with ginger root and acai berries. Murano blends classic and modern Continental cuisine in an elegant, romantic setting inspired by Venice's famous Murano glass-makers. Blu, meanwhile, is reserved exclusively for passengers booked into the AquaClass staterooms (plus suite guests based on availability). It serves a healthy menu of savory appetizers (along the lines of roasted beet salad with goat cheese or Mediterranean chopped salad with pita chips and pomegranate vinaigrette) and entrees like blackened ahi tuna, pan-seared filet mignon, and herb-crusted rack of lamb.

Several other options are scattered around the ship. Forward of the Ensemble Lounge, the centrally located Bistro on Five is a casual, chic restaurant with a menu of specialty crepes, sandwiches, soups, salads, and entrees including quiche, fish and chips, baked ziti, and chicken pot pie. Right across the corridor, Café al Bacio & Gelateria is an upscale coffeehouse serving specialty coffees, teas, fresh-baked pastries, traditional gelatos and Italian ices, and other desserts. In the Solarium, the AquaSpa Café serves spa cuisine, including salads, lean meats, seafood, and fresh fruit smoothies.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The Solstice-class Pool Deck is one of the most serene in the cruise biz, owing to the decision to place the ship's busy buffet restaurant and grill on a separate deck, one level up. That decision automatically changed the Pool Deck from a busy, multipurpose space into one whose sole purpose is serene, resortlike relaxation. Surrounding two pools (one for "sports," one for families) and four hot tubs are 12 white, 25-foot, A-frame canopies supporting cantilevered awnings and providing shade for chaise longues on both the Resort Deck (the ships' pool deck) and the Lido Deck above. A dancing fountain occupies a central position at the aft of the pool area, ringed with deck chairs. Forward of the pools, the glass-ceilinged Solarium is a peaceful enclave for adults only, with a lap pool, cushioned teak lounge chairs, views all around, and the AquaSpa Café.

The ships' AquaSpa is done up in a soothing sea of white and Aegean blue, its colonnade and domed rotunda reception area designed as a contemporary interpretation of the architecture found on Greek Islands such as Santorini and Mykonos. Besides massages, facials, and other favorites, the treatment menu includes acupuncture, Botox wrinkle treatments, teeth whitening, and cosmetic dermal fillers to smooth smile lines. The Persian Garden is a steam room of the old (think Ottoman Empire) style, glossed with a contemporary, New Agey vibe. It's complimentary for guests booked into AquaSpa staterooms and suites; everybody else has to pay. The ships' gyms are large and extremely well equipped.

The Millennium Class: Celebrity Millennium • Infinity • Summit • Constellation

Celebrity Millennium *(photo: Celebrity Cruises)*

The Verdict

Among the classiest big ships at sea, the Millennium ships offer all the leisure, sports, and entertainment options of a megaship and an atmosphere that combines old-world elegance and modern casual style.

Specifications

Size (in tons)	91,000	Year Launched	
Passengers (double occ.)	1,950	*Millennium*	2000
Passenger/Space Ratio	46.7	*Infinity*	2001
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	975/590	*Summit*	2001
Crew	999	*Constellation*	2002
Passenger/Crew Ratio	2 to 1	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	N/A

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	5	Dining Options	5
Appearance & Upkeep	5	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	5
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	4
Decor	5	Enjoyment Factor	5

In creating its third generation of newbuilds, Celebrity took the best ideas from the wonderful Century-class ships and ratcheted them up in terms of both scale and number: bigger ships, bigger spas and theaters, more veranda cabins, more dining options, more shopping, more lounges, and more sports and exercise facilities, plus more of the same great service, cuisine, and high-style onboard art for which the company was already known. They may not be as cutting edge as the newer Solstice-class ships, but these vessels are still mighty fine.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$84	170	yes	yes	yes	yes
Outside	$100	170–191	yes	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$264	251–1,432	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS Standard inside and outside cabins are a roomy 170 square feet and come with a small sitting area, stocked minifridge, TV, safe, ample storage space, cotton robes, and shampoo dispensers built right into the shower. Decor features elegant striped, floral, or patterned fabrics in shades such as butterscotch and pinkish terra cotta, along with Art Deco–style lighting fixtures and marble desktops. Only thing

missing? Individual reading lights above the beds, though there are table lamps on the nightstands.

Premium and Deluxe staterooms have slightly larger sitting areas and approximately 40-square-foot verandas. The 12 Family Ocean View staterooms in the stern on Panorama, Sky, and Vista decks measure in at a very large 271 square feet and have two entertainment centers with TVs/VCRs, a partitioned sitting area with two convertible sofa beds, and very, very, very large 242-square-foot verandas facing the ships' wake.

Passengers booking the ConciergeClass staterooms on Sky Deck get a bunch of cushy extras, from a bottle of champagne to a choice of pillows, upgraded bedding, oversize towels, double-thick Frette bathrobes, priority for just about everything (dining, shore excursions, luggage delivery, embarkation, and debarkation), and cushioned chairs and high-powered binoculars on their 41-square-foot balconies. Unfortunately, many of those balconies (as well as those attached to several Deluxe Ocean View cabins at Sky Deck midships) catch a little shadow from the overhanging deck above. ***Hint:*** Several ConciergeClass cabins on Sky Deck (9038 and 9043) and Panorama Deck (8045 and 8046) offer extralarge verandas at no extra cost. Ask your travel agent.

Suites on the Millennium ships offer 24-hour butler service and come in four levels, from the 251-square-foot Sky Suites with balconies to the eight 467-square-foot Celebrity Suites (with dining area, separate bedroom, two TV/VCR combos, and whirlpool bathtub, but no verandas) and the 538-square-foot Royal Suites (also with a separate living/dining room, two TV/VCR combos, a standing shower and whirlpool bathtub, and a huge 195-sq.-ft. veranda with whirlpool tub). At the top of the food chain, the massive Penthouse Suites measure 1,432 square feet and offer herringbone wood floors, a marble foyer, a computer station, a Yamaha piano, and a simply amazing bathroom with ocean views and a full-size hot tub. And did we mention a 1,098-square-foot veranda that wraps around the stern of the ship and features a whirlpool tub and full bar? The only downside is you sometimes feel the vibrations of the engines a few decks below.

Passengers requiring use of a wheelchair have a choice of 26 cabins, from Sky Suites to balcony cabins to inside staterooms.

PUBLIC AREAS There's simply nothing else at sea like the Grand Foyer atrium, the stunning hub of all four ships. Each rectangular, three-deck area features a translucent, inner-illuminated onyx staircase that glows beneath your feet, plus giant silk flower arrangements and topiaries, oceanview elevators, and an attractive Internet center.

In each ship's bow is the elegant three-deck theater whose warm glow is provided by faux torches spaced all around. Seating on all three levels is unobstructed except in the far reaches of the balconies. You'll also find elegant martini, champagne, and caviar bars, as well as brighter, busier lounges for live music. For the real dancing, head up to the stunning observation lounge/disco on Sunrise Deck. Other rooms include a two-deck library; a large casino; an oceanview florist/conservatory (created with the help of Paris-based floral designer Emilio Robba and filled mostly with silk flowers and trees, some of which are for sale); and the huge, high-tech conference center and cinema. Celebrity's signature Michael's Club is a quiet, dignified piano bar replete with fake fireplace and comfy leather club chairs. Little used during the day, it's a great place to snuggle up with a good book, while at night it's an excellent place for an after-dinner drink.

The ships' Emporium Shops have a nice variety of high-end name brands as well as cheap souvenirs.

For kids, the Shipmates Fun Factory has both indoor and outdoor soft-surface jungle gyms, a wading pool, a ball bin, a computer room, a movie room, an arts-and-crafts area, a video arcade, a teen center, and more.

DINING OPTIONS The main dining rooms are beautiful two-level spaces with huge stern-facing windows, oversize round windows to port and starboard, and a dramatic central double staircase. *Summit*'s dining room boasts a 7-foot Art Deco bronze of the goddess Athena that once overlooked the grand staircase on the legendary SS *Normandie* ocean liner. (She'd resided for years near the pool at Miami's Fontainebleau Hotel before Celebrity bought her and returned her to sea.)

The real *pièce de résistance* on these ships, however, is their alternative, reservations-only restaurants, which offer dining experiences unmatched on any other ship today. *Millennium*'s is the Edwardian-style Olympic restaurant, whose decor features several dozen hand-carved French walnut wall panels made by Palestinian craftsmen for the A La Carte restaurant on *Titanic*'s sister ship *Olympic,* which sailed from 1911 to 1935. *Infinity*'s SS United States restaurant features etched-glass panels from the 1950s liner of the same name, which still holds the transatlantic speed record for a liner. *Summit*'s Normandie restaurant features original gold-lacquered panels from the smoking room of the legendary *Normandie,* while the *Constellation*'s Ocean Liners restaurant has artifacts from a variety of luxury liners, including sets of original red-and-black lacquered panels from the 1920s *Ile de France,* which add a whimsical Parisian air. Dining here is a 2- to 3-hour commitment, with some 100 guests served by a gracious staff of more than 20, including 8 dedicated chefs, 6 waiters, 5 maitre d's, and 4 sommeliers. Waiters remove domed silver dish covers with a flourish, exceptional cheeses are offered post-meal, and a pianist or a piano/violin duo performs period music.

Cuisine here is a combination of Continental specialties mixed with original recipes from the ships the restaurants are named after—the original Waldorf Pudding recipe from the White Star Liner *Olympic,* for instance, served in *Millennium*'s Edwardian-style Olympic restaurant, or the Long Island duckling featured on the original SS *United States.* Appetizers include such items as creamy lobster broth, tartare of salmon garnished with quail eggs, and goat cheese soufflé with tomato coulis, followed by entrees such as sea bass brushed with tapenade, scampi flambéed in Armagnac, and rack of lamb coated with mushroom duxelles and wrapped in a puff pastry. Some flambéed dishes are cooked tableside. For dessert, you can't go wrong with a chocolate soufflé or a plate of bite-size desserts. You can order a la carte or opt for a set multicourse tasting menu (for $30), with an optional $28 slate of wine pairings. Wines are also available by the glass or bottle.

The huge buffet restaurant on each ship is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, offering regular buffet selections plus pizza, pasta, and ice-cream specialty stations. Depending on how busy the restaurant is, waiters may carry passengers' trays to their tables and fetch coffee. For snacks, visit the appealing Cova Café, a bustling, Italian-style joint with rich fabrics, cozy banquettes, and wood-frame chairs, serving exceptionally good freshly baked pastries (complimentary) and specialty coffees (for an extra charge).

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The spas on the Millennium-class ships are gorgeous and sprawling, their 25,000 square feet taken up with hydrotherapy treatment rooms; New Agey "Persian Garden" steam suites whose nooks

offer showers that simulate a tropical rainforest, heated tiled couches, and the aromas of chamomile, eucalyptus, and mint; and large, bubbling thalassotherapy pools with soothing pressure jets in a solarium-like setting under a glass roof. The pool is free to all adult guests, and you can stretch out the experience by grabbing a casual breakfast or lunch at the AquaSpa Café, set back by the seaview windows.

Next door to the spa there's a very large gym with dozens of the latest machines and free weights, and a large aerobics floor.

Up top, the Sports Deck has facilities for basketball, volleyball, quoits, and paddle tennis. Just below, on the Sunrise Deck, are a jogging track and a golf simulator. Below that is the well-laid-out Pool Deck, where you'll find two pools, four hot tubs, a couple of bars, and a sunning area. Head up to the balcony level above the pool, at both the bow and the stern, for quieter sunbathing spots.

The Century Class: Celebrity Century • Celebrity Mercury

The Verdict

Now more than a decade old, Celebrity's Century-class ships still shine, with classic modernist style and Celebrity's usual elegant yet casual vibe.

Celebrity Mercury *(photo: Matt Hannafin)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)		Crew	
Century	70,606	*Century*	843
Mercury	77,713	*Mercury*	900
Passengers (double occ.)		Passenger/Crew Ratio	2 to 1
Century	1,750	Year Launched	
Mercury	1,896	*Century*	1995
Passenger/Space Ratio	41	*Mercury*	1997
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins		Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Century	875/61	*Century*	2006
Mercury	948/220	*Mercury*	2007

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

★★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	5	Dining Options	4
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	5
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	4
Decor	5	Enjoyment Factor	5

These are the ships that ushered Celebrity into the megaship world and also sealed the line's rep for offering elegant, gorgeously designed vessels with a truly modern flair. It's difficult to say what's most striking: The elegant spas and their 15,000-gallon thalassotherapy pools? The distinguished Michael's Club piano lounges with their leather wingbacks and velvet couches? The two-story old-world dining rooms set back in the

stern, with grand floor-to-ceiling windows allowing diners to spy the ship's wake glowing under moonlight? A modern-art collection unmatched in the industry? Take your pick—you won't go wrong. Both ships underwent extensive renovations in 2006 and 2007 that spruced up their interiors and added many of the features associated with the line's more modern vessels.

In 2009, the Century class's middle sister, *Galaxy,* left the fleet to sail for the German line TUI Cruises, a subsidiary of Celebrity's parent company, Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$82	170–175	yes	yes	no	yes
Outside	$103	170–175	yes	yes	some	yes
Suite	$215	246–1,433	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS Simple yet pleasing decor is cheerful and based on light-colored furniture and muted color themes. Standard inside and outside cabins are larger than the norm, and suites, which come in four categories, are particularly spacious, with marble vanity/desk tops, Art Deco–style sconces, and rich inlaid wood floors. Some, such as the Penthouse Suite, offer more living space than you find in many private homes (1,219 sq. ft., expandable to 1,433 sq. ft. on special request), plus such wonderful touches as a private whirlpool bath on the veranda. Royal Suites run about half that size (plus 100-ft. balconies) but offer touches such as French doors between the bedroom and seating area, both bathtub and shower in the bathroom, and TVs in each room. *Mercury*'s 246-square-foot Sky Suites offer verandas that, at 179 square feet, are among the biggest aboard any ship—bigger, in fact, than those in the more expensive Penthouse and Royal suites on these ships (you may want to keep your robe on, though, as people on the deck above can see down onto part of the Sky Suite verandas). All suite bathrooms have bathtubs with whirlpools and magnified makeup mirrors. Like the Solstice- and Millennium-class ships, the Century-class ships also offer ConciergeClass staterooms, which are located mostly on the Sky and Penthouse decks. Though a tad less cushy and amenities filled than regular suites, they offer a lot of extras without the full-suite price.

All cabins are outfitted with built-in vanities/desks, stocked minifridges (accounts are billed for any snacks or drinks consumed), hair dryers, cotton robes, and safes. Closets and drawer space are roomy and well designed, as are the bathrooms. Cabin TVs are wired with an interactive system that allows guests to order room service from on-screen menus, select wine for dinner, play casino-style games, or go shopping.

Eight cabins aboard each ship (one inside and seven outside) were specifically designed for passengers with disabilities.

PUBLIC AREAS Both ships are designed so well that it's never hard to find a quiet retreat when you want to feel secluded but don't want to be confined in your cabin.

Each vessel boasts a cozy Michael's Club piano bar, decorated like the parlor of a London men's club. They're great spots for a fine cognac or a good single-malt Scotch while enjoying soft music. On *Century,* Michael's Club piano bar maintains its wood-paneled clubbiness somewhat better than aboard the *Mercury,* where it wraps around the main atrium and looks onto a very uncozy view of the shopping below. Still, you can't beat the high-backed, buttery-leather chairs and dark ambience.

For those who don't find that clubby ambience appealing, the Cova Café offers an alternative, with specialized upscale java at extra cost. There's also the popular Rendez-Vous Square, arranged so that even large groups can achieve a level of privacy and couples can find a nook of their own. On *Mercury,* it's a gorgeous, two-level space defined by rounded wooden walls, champagne-bubble carpeting and glass panels, and a two-story Sol LeWitt mural created specifically for the ship. One level features a champagne bar, the other a martini bar. Various other bars, both indoor and outdoor, are tucked into nooks and crannies throughout both ships.

The multistoried, glass-walled nightclubs/discos are spacious and cleanly, modernly elegant, designed with lots of cozy nooks for romantic conversation over champagne. Both ships have double-decker theaters with unobstructed views from almost every seat (though avoid those at the cocktail tables at the back of the rear balcony boxes, unless you have a really long neck).

The ships have held up remarkably well in their 10-plus years at sea, both in practical and aesthetic terms. On our 2007 sailing aboard *Mercury,* we noticed little wear and tear beyond a few dents in the cabin corridors (courtesy of luggage carts), a missing tile or two in the spa pool, and an occasional tarnishing of metalwork. The ship's decor, meanwhile, has a timeless quality that looks more modern than what you find on a lot of much more recent newbuilds.

DINING OPTIONS The two-story formal dining rooms on *Century* and *Mercury* are truly stunning spaces reminiscent of the grand liners of yesteryear, with wide, dramatic staircases joining the two levels and floor-to-ceiling walls of glass facing astern to a view of the ship's wake. If you lean toward the dramatic, don a gown or tux and slink down the stairs nice and slow like a 1930s Hollywood starlet. There aren't many places you can do that these days.

Century offers a dinner alternative at the Murano restaurant, named for the Venetian island famous for its glass blowing and decorated with Murano chandeliers. The restaurant's decor also includes a floor designed to resemble medieval European paving stones; a hand-painted mural themed on travel and adventure; and glass-fronted, polished nickel wine armoires displaying backlit bottles. Elaborate, multicourse meals follow the style of Celebrity's Millennium-class specialty restaurants, with their tableside cooking, carving, and flambé.

Each ship also has an indoor/outdoor buffet restaurant open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, as well as pizza and ice-cream stations.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES Pool decks aboard these vessels feature a pair of good-size swimming areas rimmed with teak benches for sunning and relaxation. Even when the ships are full, these areas don't seem particularly crowded. Aboard *Mercury,* a retractable dome covers one of the swimming pools during inclement weather.

The ships' excellent 10,000-square-foot AquaSpa and fitness facilities are as aesthetically pleasing as they are functional. The gym wraps around the starboard side of an upper forward deck like a hook, the large spa straddles the middle, and a very modern and elegant salon faces the ocean on the port side. On *Mercury,* the focal point of the spas is a 115,000-gallon thalassotherapy pool, a bubbling cauldron of warm, soothing seawater. After a relaxing 15- or 20-minute dip, choose a massage, a facial, or something more exotic, such as a Rasul treatment (a mudpack and steam bath for couples) or herbal steam bath. A day pass to the thalassotherapy pool is $20,

a weeklong pass is $99, and you get use of the pool free if you book any spa package. Unfortunately, *Century*'s thalassotherapy pool was removed during her 2006 renovation. Both ships also offer saunas and a steam room.

The gyms are generously sized, with aerobics classes in a separate room. Standard classes are free, but trendy ones such as Pilates and spinning are $10 a pop. There is also an outdoor jogging track on an upper deck, a golf simulator, and one deck that's specifically designed for sports.

4 Costa Cruises

200 S. Park Rd., Ste. 200, Hollywood, FL 33021-8541. ✆ **800/462-6782** or 954/266-5600. Fax 954/266-2100. www.costacruises.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL Imagine a Carnival megaship hijacked by an Italian circus troupe: That's Costa. The words of the day are fun, festive, and international, with big, bright new megaships providing the venue. Expect a really good time, but don't set your sights too high for cuisine. Sails to: Caribbean (plus Europe, Asia).

THE EXPERIENCE For years, Costa has played up its Italian heritage as the main factor that distinguishes it from Carnival, Royal Caribbean, and the rest—even though the line is part of the Carnival Corporation empire, and many members of the service staff are as Italian as Chico Marx. Still, there's an Italianate essence here, with more pasta dishes on the menu than on any other line; more classical Italian music among the entertainment offerings; Italian-flavored activities facilitated by a young, mostly Italian, and ridiculously attractive "animation staff"; and a huge number of Italian Americans among the passengers. The interiors of the line's newest ships are by Carnival's designer-in-chief Joe Farcus, who took inspiration from Italy's traditions of painting and architecture but still stuck close to his signature "more is more" style—think Venice a la Vegas.

Pros

- **Italian flavor:** Entertainment, activities, and cuisine are presented with an Italian carnival flair.
- **Very active, very fun:** There are a lot of activities, and Costa passengers love to participate, creating a festive and social environment morning to night.

Cons

- **Average dining:** While the pizza is excellent and some of the pasta dishes work well, overall the cuisine isn't memorable.

Compared with the other mainstream lines, here's how Costa rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor			✓		
Dining		✓			
Activities				✓	
Children's Program		✓			
Entertainment			✓		
Service		✓			
Worth the Money			✓		

COSTA: CONTINENTAL FLAVOR IN THE CARIBBEAN

Costa's origins are as Italian as could be. In 1860, Giacomo Costa established an olive-oil refinery and packaging plant in Genoa. After his death, his sons bought a ship called *Ravenna* to transport raw materials and finished products from Sardinia through Genoa to the rest of Europe, thereby marking the founding of Costa Line in 1924. Between 1997 and 2000, Carnival Corporation bought up shares in Costa until it became sole owner. Today Costa's Italianness is as much a marketing tool as anything else, but it must be working: The line's presence in Europe is huge—and it's even got a foothold in the Far East, too—and in the past 7 years it's introduced seven new megaships: *Costa Mediterranea* and *Costa Fortuna* in 2003; *Costa Magica* in 2004; *Costa Concordia* in 2006; and *Costa Serena* in 2007; and *Costa Luminosa* and *Costa Pacifica,* which debuted in spring 2009.

In addition to *Costa Fortuna,* the line's *Costa Atlantica* will also be dropping quickly through the North American market in 2010, sailing a handful of New England/Canada cruises in October.

PASSENGER PROFILE

Most of Costa's ships sail in Europe, where they sail with 80% to 85% Europeans. In contrast, the 2,720-passenger ***Costa Fortuna*** is marketed to Americans for winter Caribbean sailings, attracting passengers of all ages who want lots of fun and action, and like the idea of "Cruising Italian Style," as the line's ad slogan goes. Italian Americans are heavily represented aboard every Caribbean cruise, and in general Costa passengers are big on participation, the goofier the better: Witness, for instance, the number of passengers wearing togas on Roman Bacchanal Toga Night. And we've never seen as many guests crowding the dance floor, participating in contests, or having a go at bocce or mask painting as aboard Costa's ships.

In the Caribbean, Costa appeals to retirees and young couples alike, although there are more passengers over 45 than under. Typically you won't see more than 40 or 50 kids on any one cruise except during holidays such as Christmas and spring break, when there may be as many as 500 children on board. About 70% of passengers are from North America, with the remainder mostly from Europe and South America. Because of the international mix, public announcements, lifeboat drills, and some entertainment are given in both English and Italian. The cruise director is often Italian during Caribbean sailings, and much of the activities staff is composed of multilingual Italians.

DINING

Though it varies from ship to ship, Costa's cuisine has definitely improved over the years. Pastas are totally authentic and are often very good, and the Sicilian-style pizza is fantastic. On a recent cruise, the crusty Italian rolls baked from scratch were addictive, and it was difficult to sample the *parmigiano* cheese wheel and prosciutto ham at the lunch buffet in moderation. The *millefoglie,* a flakey puff pastry cake layered with cream or chocolate, was one of the best cruise ship desserts Heidi has ever eaten.

TRADITIONAL Each dinner menu features five courses from a different region of Italy—Liguria one night, Sicily the next, and so on—plus several alternatives for each course, including the traditional pasta course. Most of the pastas, from fettuccine to spaghetti and raviolis, are shipped in direct from Italy. Many of these dishes are heavy on the cream and so are richer than some Americans are used to, but they're definitely

the dining highlight. If you feel like a change from the pasta course, try one of the interesting risottos—the crabmeat-and-champagne selection on our last cruise was fantastic. Otherwise, expect cruise staples such as poached salmon, lobster tail, grilled lamb chops, roast duck, and beef tenderloin, plus always-available classic selections such as Caesar salad and baked or grilled fish or chicken. **Vegetarian options** are available at each meal, and **Health and Wellness menu** selections are listed with their calorie, fat, and carbohydrate breakdowns. On the second formal night, flaming baked Alaska is paraded through the dining room and complimentary champagne is poured. Other desserts include tiramisu, gelato, zabaglione (meringue pie), and a tasty chocolate soufflé.

SPECIALTY The ships have a reservations-only alternative Tuscan steakhouse restaurant ($23 per person) offering tenderloins, T-bones and other cuts, seafood, and a few pasta dishes like fettuccine alfredo and *spaghetti ai gamberi* (prawns). The ambience is considerably quieter and more romantic than in the main dining room, with pleasant piano music and a small dance floor if you feel like a waltz between courses.

CASUAL There's a large buffet restaurant with multiple serving areas. Breakfast is a standard mix of eggs, meats, fruits, cereals, and cheeses. At lunch, several of the stations will serve standard dishes while others will be given over to a different national or regional cuisine (Spanish, Greek, Italian, Asian, and so forth). Casual dining is also available nightly until 9:30pm. The line's **fresh-baked pizza** (offered in one section of the buffet noon–2am) looks a little weird, but trust us, it's fantastic—one of the highlights of the food on board. On our last cruise, a Costa staffer quipped that because it was real Italian pizza (very thin, without excess cheese and sauce), you can eat as much as you like and not get fat. We *believe* him. Out on deck there's a **grill** serving burgers and hot dogs, as well as a **taco bar** at lunch. If you're looking for another afternoon snack, head over to the ice-cream station in the buffet area, which offers daily specials such as fresh banana or coconut, along with traditional flavors.

SNACKS & EXTRAS Most cruise lines have scrapped their **midnight buffets,** but Costa still offers them a few nights per cruise, often focusing on a theme taken from that evening's activity. On Mediterranean Night, the buffet offers pastry, fruits, desserts, pastas, and savories from Spain, Greece, France, and Turkey. On another night, the guests head below to the ship's massive galley for the buffet. Look for the polenta with mushroom sauce there—on our last cruise it was excellent. **Room service** is available 24 hours a day. Suite guests can order full meals delivered; all others can choose from various sandwiches, appetizers, and a full bar menu.

ACTIVITIES

More than anything else, Costa is known for its lineup of exuberant and often Italian-inspired activities, and passengers on these ships love to participate. Three nights per 7-night cruise are given over to Italian and Mediterranean themes. **Festa Italiana** turns the ship into an Italian street festival where guests are encouraged to wear the colors of the Italian flag and participate in bocce, tarantella dance lessons, pizza-dough tossing, Venetian-mask-making, and Italian karaoke. **Serata Tropical** is a deck party with a Mediterranean twist, where guests can enjoy ethnic dancing and ice-carving demonstrations amid the typical Caribbean deck party trimmings. **Mediterranean Night** transforms various parts of the ship to represent France, Turkey, Greece, and Spain, with appropriate skits, activities, singing, and games. The highlight of many

cruises is **Roman Bacchanal Toga Night,** when at least some of the guests don bedsheets, with many repeat passengers bringing their own custom models and toga accouterments. (The line provides bedsheets and tying instructions for those who don't like to plan ahead.) The evening ends with the hysterical Roman Bacchanal show, which is half slapstick vaudeville and half passenger talent show. After each act, "Julius Caesar" (and the audience) decides whether to send the performers to the buffet or throw them to the lions. It's a hoot.

During the day, activities include **Italian language and cooking classes,** as well as traditional cruise staples such as jackpot bingo, dance classes, art auctions, horse racing, bridge, arts and crafts, Ping-Pong, and fun poolside competitions in which teams have to put on Roman-style costumes or don silly hats. The ship has a combo library and Internet center, as well as a large card room. **Enrichment lectures** focus on topics such as personal finance, romance, and health. **Aerobics and stretch classes** are usually held on the covered pool area's dance floor, which also sees live steel-drum music throughout the rest of the day. Luckily, there's lots of deck space across several levels for sunbathing, so you can escape the noise if you want to. In the stern, a fun all-ages water slide operates a couple of hours per day.

A **Catholic Mass** and a nondenominational church service are held almost every day in each ship's small chapel.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

Costa's kids' programs aren't nearly as extensive as those on Disney or Royal Caribbean (or Carnival's Conquest-class and Spirit-class ships), but then, there are usually far fewer children on board. At least two full-time youth counselors sail aboard, with additional staff whenever more than a dozen or so kids are on the passenger list. **Supervised activities** are offered for kids 3 to 18, divided into two age groups unless enough children are aboard to divide them into three (3–6, 7–12, and 13–18 years) or four (3–6, 7–10, 11–14, and 15–18). The **Costa Kids Club,** for ages 3 to 12, includes such activities as Nintendo, galley tours, arts and crafts, scavenger hunts, Italian-language lessons, bingo, board games, face painting, movies, kids' karaoke, and pizza and ice-cream-sundae parties. The ships each have a pleasant children's playroom and a teen disco. If there are enough teens on board, the **Costa Teens Club** for ages 13 to 18 offers foosball and darts competitions, karaoke, and other activities.

When ships are at sea in the Caribbean, supervised Kids Club hours are typically from 9am to noon, 3 to 6pm, and 9 to 11:30pm. The program also operates during port days, but on a more limited basis.

On Gala nights there's a great complimentary **Parents' Night Out program** from 6 to 11:30pm during which kids 3 and older (they must be out of diapers) are entertained and given a special buffet or pizza party while Mom and Dad get a night out alone. All other times, **group babysitting** for ages 3 and up is available every night from 9 to 11:30pm at no cost, and from 11:30pm to 1:30am if you make arrangements in advance. No private, in-cabin babysitting is available.

Children must be at least 3 months old to sail with Costa; under-2s sail free.

ENTERTAINMENT

Although the passengers are mostly American and the location is the Caribbean, expect most entertainment to be Italian, with concerts, operatic soloists, puppet or marionette shows, mimes, acrobats, and cabaret—no language skills required. On a

Costa Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Costa Atlantica	**Caribbean:** 7-night eastern & western, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Jan–Apr). **Canada/New England:** 11-night, Québec to New York (Apr & Oct), New York to Québec (Sept). 14-night, Fort Lauderdale to Québec (Apr).
Costa Fortuna	**Caribbean:** 7-night eastern & western, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Jan–Mar).

recent cruise, one of the shows had a unicycle-riding, ball-balancing, flame-juggling, plate-spinning entertainer—the kind you used to see on *The Ed Sullivan Show.* Other featured performers included an operatic tenor singing a program of high-note crowd pleasers and a classical pianist performing Beethoven and Gershwin. The line's production shows mostly follow the typical song-and-dance revue formula; on recent sailings, creative costumes and choreography got big points, and so did the enthusiasm and versatility of the dance troupe. Participatory shows are much more fun overall, and more in tune with what Costa passengers seem to want. The Election of the Ideal Couple and a *Newlywed Game* takeoff, for instance, both clip along at a frantic pace, with the cruise staff helping and hindering as appropriate to get the most laughs. Who knew the criterion for being an ideal couple was the ability to burst a balloon with your butt?

Both ships have glitzy casinos as well as hopping discos, which often get going only after 1am.

SERVICE

In past years our main complaint about Costa was its service, which on particularly bad nights resembled a Three Stooges skit. But things have gotten better. While it's still not the Four Seasons, our last cruises showed marked improvement, with waiters seeming better trained and more polished, cabin stewards more attentive and helpful, and everyone more accommodating and friendly. On Heidi's last cruise, her waiters and the bar staff were excellent, real pros.

For **tipping,** like many other lines, Costa adds an automatic gratuity of $10 per person, per day to passengers' onboard accounts.

There are no self-service laundry facilities on any of the Costa ships.

Costa Fortuna

The Verdict

Fortuna continues Costa's trend toward heavily decorated, Carnival-like interiors, but with a lighter, almost feminine feel and a "grand Italian ocean liners of the past" theme.

Costa Fortuna *(photo: Costa Cruises)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	105,000	Crew	1,068
Passengers (double occ.)	2,720	Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.5 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio	38.6	Year Launched	2003
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	1,358/522	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	N/A

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5) ★★★★

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	4
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	5
Public Comfort/Space	4	Children's Facilities	3
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	4

Costa Fortuna, along with sister ship *Costa Magica* (which currently sticks to the Mediterranean and South America), was both Costa's and Italy's largest ship before the debut of the Europe-based *Costa Concordia* in summer 2006. Elegant with an old-world touch, *Fortuna*'s public rooms and restaurants are rich with detail, including memorabilia from legendary and historic Italian liners, including vintage posters and ship models. As on most Costa ships, *Fortuna*'s disco is very lively, and many public rooms stay crowded long after the last show has finished.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$64	160	yes	yes	no	yes
Outside	$78	160	yes	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$128	275–345	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS Standard cabins tend toward the elegant, with soft, warm colors and magic-themed prints by Augusto Vignali. Of the 1,358 cabins, 456 have balconies, as do the 64 suites. Inside cabins are very well designed, with two closet areas, a fairly generous amount of drawer space, twin or queen bed configuration, and showers. Outside staterooms with verandas are the same size, with an additional 65 square feet of private balcony, including lounge chairs and a small table. Suites range from 275 square feet with 65-square-foot balconies to 345 square feet with 85 square feet of private veranda. All staterooms have minibars, hair dryers, and safes, and suites have whirlpool baths. Some of the furnishings, especially lamps, are unusual and charming.

Twenty-seven staterooms are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS Inspired by grand Italian oceans liners of a bygone era, there's a wonderful display featuring 26 models of past and present Costa ships showcased from the ceiling of the main atrium. The restaurants and public lounge are named after famed liners, such as Rex and Cristoforo Colombo. Old map replicas as well as murals of 1930s and 1940s ship scenes are found throughout the ship along with copies of vintage ship posters and ads. The line's classic C initial logo is imprinted in the wood of the sprawling dance floor and featured elsewhere around the ship, lending a nostalgic touch to the otherwise modern ship.

DINING OPTIONS Although Costa's food has been uneven, the choices aboard the *Fortuna* show great improvement, and the Club Grand Conte restaurant is outstanding. The menu by restaurateur Zefferino has items that may be too exotic for some, but more conservative tastes have plenty of steaks, seafood, fowl, and vegetables to choose from, along with outrageously good desserts and wines. The ambience is romantic, with Versace china and gold napkins standing out against rich, dark woods and shining gold ware, with friezes from Palladio's villas reproduced around a giant skylight. The two main restaurants, Costa Michelangelo and Raffaello, feature

striking memorabilia from the great Italian ocean liners of the past. At the entrance to the Michelangelo, for example, is a 19-foot scale model of the famed transatlantic liner of the same name. Copies of vintage ship posters and ads from the 1920s and 1930s are also displayed in the two restaurants. Rounding out the dining options is the Cristoforo Colombo buffet restaurant, with a seating capacity of 926 guests.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The 4,600-square-foot Saturnia Spa is exceptionally spacious, and a huge wall of glass extends the space even more. The multilevel gym is similarly beautiful and well equipped with Pilates balls, free weights, and yoga mats. The Technogym equipment can be programmed to parameters set for you by one of the ship's personal trainers, with a digital key that will repeat the program every time you use it. Spinning bikes, treadmills, yoga classes, and health seminars supplement the range of skincare treatments, facials, wraps, and massages at the spa. A Turkish bath and sauna are also available.

The main pool area is built like an amphitheater and is clearly a place to see and be seen. The aft Lido Deck pool is covered by a removable glass roof, and on our cruise the pool and hot tubs were in use in the evenings as well as daytime. A third pool area is dedicated to children and their families.

Costa Atlantica

The Verdict

Is it a carnival or is it Carnivale? Decorated in a Europe-meets-Vegas style, this ship is eye candy for the ADD set.

Costa Atlantica *(photo: Costa Cruises)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	85,000	Crew	920
Passengers (double occ.)	2,114	Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.3 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio	40	Year Launched	2000
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	1,056/678	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	2008

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5) ★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	3
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4
Public Comfort/Space	4	Children's Facilities	3
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	4

Atlantic, and sister *Mediterranea,* ushered in the future for Costa, being a kind of European version of the Fun Ships operated by sister company Carnival. *Atlantica* was the first of the Farcus-designed Costa-designed ships and remains one of the most successful style combinations, going to the top, but not over it. True, there are flashing lights along the elevators, but there are also mosaics and frescoes throughout and enough Carrera marble to have driven a Renaissance sculptor crazy. The Fellini theme works particularly well to combine Italian flavor and Farcus's fantasy, and the art on board is spectacular. You could spend a whole cruise examining the elaborate woods

in the doors and ceilings and the amusing and comfortable furniture. Cruising on the *Atlantica* is like being in an Escher painting: fantastic detail and endless illusion.

Built along the same lines as Carnival's Spirit-class ships, at nearly 1,000 feet long, the ship cuts a sleek profile, and its bright yellow, barrel-like smokestacks, emblazoned with a big blue Costa C, distinguishes it from its Carnival cousins.

Despite the obvious success of the Spirit-class design (six Carnival and Costa ships are based on it, and Holland America has adapted it for its Vista-class vessels), we're not completely in love with it. The main public decks have a zigzagging layout that lacks the easy flow of some competitors, and some areas in the bow are downright bizarre: For instance, the wide outdoor promenade on Deck 3 ducks indoors as it goes forward, becoming a long, strange, marble-floored lounge. Is it a place to sit? Is it a place to walk? No one seems to know, so it gets hardly any use. But maybe that's a plus, making its little marble tables, wicker chairs, and small couches decent places to escape the crowds.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$57	160	yes	yes	no	yes
Outside	$71	210	yes	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$128	360–650	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS The cherrywood in the cabins and jewel-tone fabrics create a pleasant environment, and well over half of the cabins have private balconies. Each has a stocked, pay-as-you-go minifridge; hair dryer; personal safe; and more than adequate storage space, and all outside cabins have sitting areas with couches. The views from all category-4 cabins on Deck 4 are completely obstructed by lifeboats, and the category-6 balcony cabins directly above, on Deck 5, are partially obstructed as well. Bathrooms have good storage space.

The 32 Panorama suites on Decks 5 and 6 measure 272 square feet, and have a 90-square-foot balcony with attractive granite coffee tables, wooden chairs, and desks. Suites have large couches that can double as a bed, two separate floor-to-ceiling closets, lots of drawer space, and large bathrooms with whirlpool bathtubs, marble counters, and double sinks. Adjacent is a dressing room with a vanity table, drawers, and a closet. The Grand Suites are the largest accommodations aboard. Six are located amidships on Deck 7 and measure 372 square feet, plus 118-square-foot balconies; the other eight are aft on decks 4, 6, 7, and 8 and measure 367 square feet, plus 282-square-foot balconies.

Eight cabins are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS *Atlantica*'s theme is taken from Fellini's movies with huge stills from his classics and blown-up paparazzi photos of stars. Each deck is named for a Fellini film—La Dolce Vita, La Strada, and so on—and the eighth deck is dubbed 8½. Fantasy permeates the ship from the lipstick-red leather chairs to the suspended glass staircase connecting the two levels of Club Atlantica, the alternative restaurant/nightclub. The staircase was designed by the same Venetian sculptor as the glass dancers by the Fred and Ginger pools (okay, it's not all Fellini). The details are beyond rich; even the elevators' interiors deserve notice. People on board with us spent an incredible amount of time arguing the relative merits of the chairs with springs and tassels and those with little black boots.

The disco is a darkish, two-story, cavelike space with a staircase leading down into what is appropriately called "Dante's." Video-screen walls, fog machines, and translucent dance floors entertain the very stylish crowd that keeps the disco going into the morning. The three-level theater on each ship has velvety high-backed seating and very high-tech and elaborate stages. Downstairs, on the lowest passenger deck is a smaller show lounge used for late-night comedy acts, karaoke, and cocktail parties, but don't worry, you're still above the waterline. There's also a big glitzy casino with a festive Vegas-style mood, several large lounges that feature musical entertainment in the evenings, a smallish but pleasant library/Internet center, and a roomy, elegant card room. A kids' playroom, teen center, large video arcade, and chapel (one of these things is not like the others . . .) are all squirreled away in the bow on decks 4 and 5.

DINING OPTIONS Aside from an elegant two-story dining room, there's a two-story alternative, reservations-only restaurant high up on Deck 10, charging guests $23 per person for the privilege of dining (suite guests can go free of charge once per cruise). The alternative restaurants feature the molecular cuisine (low fat, but rich in flavor) of Ettore Bocchia, executive chef at the Michelin-starred Grand Hotel in Bellagio. Its atmosphere is its best feature, with dim lights, candlelight, fresh flowers, soft live music, and lots of space between tables. For a quieter and more romantic mood, the alternative restaurant is a nice change of pace, but don't linger past 10pm if you don't want cigar smoke to spoil your elegant dinner: That's when the restaurant's second story becomes a cigar lounge.

For casual breakfast, lunch, and (6 nights a week) dinner, head to the sprawling indoor/outdoor buffet restaurant. Soft ice cream and pizza made with herbs and fresh mozzarella are served from stations here. Look up when you get to the very end of the restaurant, before heading out to the stern pool area: There's a huge, amazing Murano glass chandelier up there that you'd never notice unless you craned your head on purpose.

One of *Atlantica*'s most delightful spaces is a faithful copy of Venice's Caffe Florian, a great choice for a glass of wine or a specialty coffee.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The gym is a pleasant two-tiered affair with machines on many different levels and a large hot tub in the center. With the Technogym equipment, you set up your workout and it is saved on an electronic key, which you can also take with you to use on the same equipment in landside gyms.

The spa offers your typical menu of treatments, including 50-minute massages, facials, and reflexology treatments. There are three pools on each ship, two of them in the loud, active main pool area and another in the stern. Above the latter is a neat water slide for all ages. Other sports and relaxation amenities include four hot tubs, a golf driving net, and a combo volleyball, basketball, and tennis court. If you explore, you'll find lots of deck space for sunbathing and hiding away with a deck chair and a page turner.

5 Cunard

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THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL The most venerable line in the cruise industry, Cunard is a classic, providing a link to the golden age of passenger ships. **Sails to:** Caribbean, New England/Canada, transatlantic (plus Europe, Africa, South America, world cruise).

THE EXPERIENCE The Cunard of today is not the Cunard of yesterday, but then again, it is. Formed in 1840 by Sir Samuel Cunard, the line provided the first regular steamship service between Europe and North America, and was one of the dominant players during the great years of steamship travel, which lasted roughly from 1905 to the mid-1960s. In 1969, long after it was clear that jet travel had replaced the liners, the company made what some considered a foolhardy move, launching *Queen Elizabeth 2* and setting her on a mixed schedule, half-crossing, half-cruising. Through sheer persistence, the ship proved the critics wrong, and thrived throughout 40 years of Cunard service, even if the company endured some rough times.

Today *QE2* has been retired from the Cunard fleet, departing in late 2008 to begin a new life as a permanently docked luxury hotel, entertainment destination, and maritime museum at the Palm Jumeirah, the world's largest manmade island. Her replacement, the 151,400-ton *Queen Mary 2 (QM2),* is as modern as ships get, and was bigger than all the others until Royal Caribbean's 160,000-ton *Freedom of the Seas* came along (though *QM2* remains the *longest* by 20 ft.). *QM2* is also an homage to all that went before, designed with oversize grandeur and old-world formality in mind, and even a dose of blatant class structure: Some restaurants and outdoor decks are set aside specifically for suite guests only, if you please. As she's the only Cunarder currently serving the North American market, all details in this review refer to her alone.

Pros

- **Classic ambience:** Despite a few chintzy touches, *QM2* really does live up to its billing as the grandest afloat, with some rooms that could have come right out of a 1940s liner.
- **Pure prestige:** There used to be ships that everyone in the world knew—"Oh, you're sailing on the *Queen Mary,*" they'd say. "That's the ship Marlene Dietrich took on her last crossing." *QM2* is the only ship launched in more than a quarter century with that kind of broad public cachet.
- **Special experiences:** Dancing in the bustling ballroom on formal evenings, dozing in one of the hundreds of teak deck chairs on the Promenade, or watching the ship's hull slice through Atlantic swells at 28 knots are intangible though immensely pleasurable experiences.
- **S-p-a-c-e:** This ship is absolutely enormous, from her hangar-size ballroom to the cavernously high ceilings of many public areas.

Cons

- **Not *quite* luxe:** Despite her grandeur, *QM2* carries too many passengers to provide the kind of intimacy and personal feel you get on the true luxury lines—especially those operating small ships (Silversea, SeaDream, and Seabourn), but also on relatively large vessels such as *Crystal Serenity.*
- **Occasional off notes:** If you're going to design a huge corridor of showy Art Deco wall panels, don't make those panels out of plastic. And what's with the jarring white pillars in the atrium and the virtual market of cheap trinkets set up some afternoons in the main passageway?

CUNARD: GETTING THERE IS HALF THE FUN

Once upon a time, Cunard ruled the waves. Its ships—first *Mauretania* and *Lusitania,* later *Queen Mary* and *Queen Elizabeth*—were the fastest and most reliable at sea. Then somebody invented the jet airliner and the whole passenger-shipping business

Compared with the other mainstream lines, here's how Cunard rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor					✓
Dining				✓	
Activities					✓
Children's Program					✓
Entertainment				✓	
Service				✓	
Worth the Money					✓

went to hell. Numbers dropped. Ships went cruising for their bread. Cunard stuck to its guns, though, keeping *QE2* on the Atlantic until sheer doggedness gave it a certain cachet as the last of the old breed. Fleetmates came and went, including the little *Sea Goddess* yachts (now with SeaDream) and a number of midsize ships acquired from other lines, but *QE2* soldiered on and managed to carry the company, and its reputation, through some rough times.

An almost 3-decade-long period of corporate troubles and shuffling ownership ended in April 1998, when Carnival Corporation acquired Cunard from the Norwegian company Kvaerner Group. To some it seemed a comedown for the venerable line, but Commodore Ronald Warwick and other Cunard employees saw it as an unqualified boon. "To my mind," Warwick told a group of journalists, "Carnival Corporation were the white knights that saved us from demise, and when the planning of the *Queen Mary 2* was announced, I experienced a feeling of pleasure and relief. They'd delivered a message to the world and to those of us on the 'shop floor' that they were determined to build on the maritime heritage for which our company has been famous."

Today, Cunard is again very famous indeed after all the media attention that accompanied *QM2*'s launch, but it's hardly the old British brand that its advertising might lead you to believe. In late 2004, for instance, the company was swallowed whole by Carnival Corporation subsidiary Princess Cruises. Its operations and staff were absorbed into Princess's at the latter's suburban Los Angeles headquarters, which meant crewmembers and officers would be rotated between the two lines—a move considered blasphemous by many hard-core Cunard fans—but frankly, something that the average passenger won't realize or even mind.

QM2 is currently the only Cunard ship spending substantial time in North American waters. Cunard's newest liner, the *Queen Victoria,* debuted in December 2007, but is sailing primarily European voyages, so is not reviewed in this book. *QE2,* the ship that kept Cunard alive for 3 decades, was retired and left Cunard in November 2008.

PASSENGER PROFILE

In general, Cunard attracts a well-traveled crowd of passengers mostly in their 50s and up, many of them repeaters who appreciate the line's old-timey virtues and are more the 4-o'clock-tea crowd than the hot-tub-and-umbrella-drink set. That said, the hoopla surrounding the launch of *QM2* is attracting a much wider demographic, especially on summer Atlantic crossings when families travel together and about 50%

of passengers might be from the U.S. British passengers make up the next largest percentage, and usually several hundred passengers hail from various other nations, making Cunard one of the few truly international cruises.

DINING

TRADITIONAL Cunard is the last bastion of the old steamship tradition of segregating passengers according to accommodations category, though for the most part, the practice is limited to dining hours. This means that passengers are assigned to one of the three reserved-seating restaurants according to the level of cabin accommodations they've booked: Suite passengers dine in the 206-seat **Queen's Grill;** Junior Suite passengers dine in the 180-seat **Princess Grill;** and everyone else dines in the three-deck, 1,351-seat **Brittania Restaurant**—decor-wise, the most beautiful of the three and a fitting heir to the grand restaurants of the past. The two Grills are always single seating at an assigned table, while the Britannia has early and late seatings for dinner and open seating for breakfast and lunch.

To make matters a bit more confusing, in spring 2007 Cunard introduced the **Britannia Club,** an intimate section of the Britannia seating around 100 passengers who are booked in the deluxe balcony cabins. Thanks to the Club's single-seating dining, and more table-side preparation and enhanced menu options, those dining here won't have to pay the significant fare hike to dine in the Grills, while still having a more personalized and leisurely dining experience. *QM2*'s cuisine sticks close to tradition, with entrees that might include pheasant with southern haggis and port-wine sauce, roasted prime rib, grilled lobster with garden pea risotto, and scallion wild-rice crepes with mushroom filling and red-pepper sauce. On a recent cruise, the food and service were very good, roughly on par with what you might experience in the main dining rooms of the Celebrity ships. The Grill restaurants also offer the option of requesting whatever dish comes into your head—if they have the ingredients aboard, someone in the galley will whip it up for you (caviar is available on request). Otherwise, it's the intimacy and cachet of the Grill restaurants that set them apart more than the food does, as many of the same dishes are served in the Britannia as well. The location on the Promenade Deck near the casual dining venue makes the experience less exclusive than the Grills on *QE2.* At all three restaurants, **special diets** can be accommodated, and **vegetarian** and **health-conscious Canyon Ranch SpaClub dishes** are available as a matter of course.

SPECIALTY In the stern on Deck 8, *QM2*'s **Todd English restaurant** is a small, 156-seat, Mediterranean dining spot that echoes the original *Queen Mary*'s Verandah Grill, one of that ship's most legendary spaces. Created by celebrity chef Todd English, the restaurant serves elaborate and often very rich lunches ($20 per person) and dinners ($30 per person), with some truly amazing desserts. On Heidi's recent *QM2* crossing, she enjoyed her best meal in Todd English.

One deck down, adjacent to the King's Court, the contemporary **Chef's Galley** serves only two dozen guests (no cover charge), who get to watch the chef prepare their meal via an open galley and several large monitor screens. Just don't expect to be dazzled by the decor—it's minimalist.

CASUAL Almost a third of Deck 7 is given over to the **King's Court,** a large buffet restaurant that stretches out for nearly half a deck along both sides of the ship. The somewhat overwhelming cluster of food stations, which some passengers find quite frustrating to navigate, runs down the center of the area, with many small, cozy areas

along the sides; there is no outdoor seating. At night, the space is partitioned off into three separate casual restaurants: the **Carvery,** serving carved beef, pork, lamb, and poultry, along with gourmet English favorites; **La Piazza,** serving pizza, pasta, and other Italian specialties 24 hours; and **Lotus,** a Pan-Asian restaurant blending Chinese, Japanese, Thai, and Indian influences. All are free, but reservations are recommended at dinner.

SNACKS & EXTRAS On Deck 2, the oversize **Golden Lion Pub** serves English pub grub, while *w-a-a-a-ay* up on Deck 12, you can get standard burgers and dogs at the outdoor **Boardwalk Café,** weather permitting. Traditional **afternoon tea,** usually accompanied by a string quartet, is served in the **Queen's Room,** the ship's most classic, traditional space. The selection of some 23 teas includes Darjeeling, jasmine, and Japanese green tea. The elegant room hearkens back to the dramatic ballrooms of yesteryear, with a high arched ceiling and crystal chandeliers. **Room service** is available 24 hours a day.

ACTIVITIES

As you would expect, Cunard ships have a more distinguished variety of activities than most other big liners, especially its Fun Ship cousins at Carnival. Rather than "woo-hoo" good times, Cunard concentrates on **learning experiences** and **the arts,** with a healthy dollop of pampering to keep things light.

Central to the onboard experience is Cunard Insights, the line's lecture program: Instructors, celebrities, and other learned authors and superaccomplished authorities present talks on literature, political history, marine science, ocean-liner history, music and pop culture, modern art, Shakespeare on film, architectural history, cooking, computer applications, languages, and many other topics. On crossings, there are so many worthwhile lectures that you may find yourself sitting in the theater all morning long. *QM2* has even managed to attract a handful of stars, with Uma Thurman, Rod Stewart, Lenny Kravitz, Richard Dreyfuss, John Cleese, and others having sailed, and some lectured, in the past 2 years.

Passengers who prefer book learning can take advantage of the largest and by far the most impressive **library** at sea: a huge, beautifully designed space that actually looks like a library, unlike the typical rooms-with-a-few-bookshelves on most megaships. Next door, a **bookshop** sells volumes on passenger-ship history, as well as Cunard memorabilia. Other shops, clustered around *QM2*'s atrium, sell everything from high-end Hermès to low-end souvenirs and jewelry, some of it sold in a rather undignified way from long tables set up in the public corridors. Continuing the marine history topic, the ship's **Maritime Quest** (MQ—get it?) history trail offers a museum-quality timeline set up in various places throughout the ship, with an audio tour available to tie it all together.

A visit to *QM2*'s attractive **Canyon Ranch SpaClub** is another popular activity. The pleasant decor combines nautical undertones with a modern minimalist motif to create a most relaxing space that includes a thermal suite, a salon with wonderful ocean views, and more than 20 treatment rooms clustered around a co-ed thalassotherapy pool and hot tub reserved for spa-goers. The only seagoing Canyon Ranch spa is a refreshing break from the Steiner-run spas on most ships; it offers some truly different therapies—for example, the Ashiatsu massage incorporates the therapist's feet—and far less of Steiner's pushiness to sell skin-care products. The *QM2*'s gym, which wraps around the bow on Deck 7, is surprisingly small and uninspired for a

ship this large and well conceived, but it does what it needs to do and offers treadmills and stationary bikes with flatscreen TV monitors. Classes include Pilates and yoga.

Aside from all these interesting options, you'll find a number of less cerebral pursuits as well, from wine tastings to art auctions to scarf-tying seminars.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

The *QM2* is more than high tea and stiffer upper lips. Finger paints and cartoons are just as much a part of the ship's activities as ballroom dancing and quoits. Though you might not expect it from a grand liner that (one imagines) is filled with sophisticated seniors, *QM2* offers great digs for kids. The kids' complex, called **The Zone,** is open to kids ages 1 and up—an extraordinarily young minimum age shared only by Disney's ships. (Most ships with kids' programming welcome kids 3 and up, a few ages 2 and up.) Facilities are divided by age. The 1-to-6 set occupies half of a bright, cheery, and roomy area with lots of toys, arts and crafts, a play gym and ball pit, and big-screen TVs (and the staff do change diapers). There's also a separate **nursery** with 10 crib/toddler-bed combos for napping tots (no other line has a separate room for sleepers). Bring a stroller if your kids are young: Remember, the *QM2* is the longest passenger ship in the world, so getting from one end of a deck to the other is a hike.

Just beyond the oceanview space is a play gym outside on the stern of Deck 6, along with a wading pool, a regular pool, and a water-spray fountain for kids (of all ages) to run through. Officially it's called the Family Deck, though anyone who doesn't mind screeching children can lounge there. The other half of the play area is reserved for kids 7 to 17, with the 7-to-12 crowd usually occupying a play area with beanbag chairs, lots of board games, TVs, and a number of Xbox video-game systems. **Activities for teens**—including ship tours, movies and production shows in the theaters, and pizza parties—are usually held elsewhere.

The kids' program is staffed by several British nannies, who have completed a 2-year program in the discipline back in England, plus a handful of other activity counselors, many of whom have backgrounds as schoolteachers. The best part? Aside from 2 hours at lunchtime and an hour or two in the afternoon, The Zone provides complimentary supervised activities and care from 9am to midnight, so you can dine with the adults and know that your offspring are being well cared for (on other lines, you must generally pay an hourly fee after 10pm). You can take your kids to eat earlier in the King's Court buffet restaurant in a special section of the restaurant, the **Chef's Galley,** that's reserved for a **children's tea** daily from 5 to 6pm (of course, it's not really tea that's served, but the standard kiddie favorites of pasta, chicken fingers, and the like).

Though *QM2*'s kids' program is awesome, there are rarely more than 250 kids aboard and usually fewer (compared to the 800–1,200 kids and teens typically aboard similar-size ships). This is a plus: Fewer kids means more attention and space for the ones who are there. Keep in mind, though, if a sailing is especially full, the counselors reserve the right to limit participation and will ask parents to choose either the morning or the afternoon session; everyone can be accommodated during evenings. In contrast, other major lines have "don't turn away" policies, so you're guaranteed that your child will be accommodated, even if the playrooms are jampacked because of it (as they usually are during the early-evening hr.).

On top of everything else, there's an impressive medical center on the *QM2* as well, which came in handy when Heidi's son got an ear infection on a crossing. No question: top-rate facilities.

Cunard Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Queen Mary 2	**Transatlantic:** 6-night east- & westbound between New York and Southampton, UK (May–Nov). **Caribbean:** 11- & 15-night, r/t New York (Nov–Dec). **Canada/New England:** 5-night, r/t New York (July, Oct). 7-, 9-, 14- & 16-night, r/t New York (Sept–Oct).

ENTERTAINMENT

Entertainment aboard *QM2* runs the gamut from plays featuring graduates of Britain's Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) to some pretty run-of-the-mill song-and-dance revues. The former perform generally from April to November as part of a partnership between Cunard and the school, with RADA graduates and students also offering a variety of readings and workshops, including acting classes. Besides **theater,** *QM2*'s lounges feature a wide variety of **music,** from string quartets and harpists in the **Winter Garden** conservatory; to jazz in the **Chart Room;** to high-toned dance music in the gorgeous **Queen's Ballroom** (with gentleman hosts on hand to partner with single ladies); and low-toned music in the **G32 disco.** On Deck 2, the large, beautifully appointed **Empire Casino** is more Monte Carlo than Vegas, with refined art and furnishings rather than the usual clangor of an arcade.

Whereas most ships have one theater, *QM2*'s **lecture program** is so busy that there are two. As the secondary theater, **Illuminations** is smaller than the **Royal Court Theatre,** but is probably the most used room on the ship. It serves triple duty as a lecture hall, a movie theater, and also the world's only oceangoing planetarium that shows 3-D films, some of them created in conjunction with noted institutions such as the American Museum of Natural History and the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum.

See the ship review below for a discussion of *QM2*'s other theaters and lounges.

SERVICE

With their classy uniforms and cordial, gracious efficiency, *QM2*'s crewmembers exhibit a polished sort of British demeanor—even when they're actually from the Philippines. That said, the sheer size of the vessel and large number of passengers means they do their share of rushing around and keeping up, just as aboard all the other huge cruise ships today.

The line's automatic gratuity policy adds a fee of $11 per person, per day to the accounts of guests in standard cabins, and $13 per day for suite guests.

Queen Mary 2

The Verdict

Faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, *QM2* is literally in a class by herself: a modern reinterpretation of the golden age luxury liner, bigger than anything that's gone before, and built to sail hard seas well into the 21st century.

Queen Mary 2 *(photo: Cunard)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	151,400	Crew	1,253
Passengers (double occ.)	2,592	Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.1 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio	58.4	Year Launched	2003
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	1,296/783	Last Major Refurbishment	2008

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5) ★★★★★

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	4.5
Appearance & Upkeep	5	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4.5
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	5
Decor	4.5	Enjoyment Factor	5

Before her launch, we often heard *QM2* referred to by industry types as "Micky's White Elephant"—Micky being Micky Arison, chairman of Carnival Corporation; the criticism referred to the fact that *QM2*'s design and construction sucked up about a billion dollars and 5 years of labor, a record expenditure to match her record-breaking size.

But that was before her launch. That was before the Queen of England did the honors at her naming ceremony. That was before the fireworks and traffic jams that attended her first arrival into every port, and amazingly enough, still continue to this day in many ports. And it was definitely before the media glommed onto her as the first really newsworthy ship to be launched since . . . well, since *QE2,* probably. And when you control about half the cruise industry, as Carnival Corporation does, that kind of publicity is priceless.

When all is said and done, *QM2* deserves all the hype. She's a really remarkable ship: classic yet contemporary, refined yet fun, huge yet homey, and grand, grand, grand. The longest passenger ship at sea (when Royal Caribbean's *Freedom of the Seas* was launched in spring 2006, it snatched the title as biggest in terms of tonnage), she's also the only real ocean liner built since her older sister hit the water in 1969—and that, perhaps, needs some explanation. What is it exactly that makes an ocean liner different?

In a word, "more"—of everything. "We had a working definition that built on the idea of 'enhancement,'" Stephen Payne, *QM2*'s designer, told us just before the ship debuted. "The ship had to have enhanced strength and sea-keeping characteristics to withstand continuous exposure to North Atlantic conditions; enhanced speed to maintain her schedule [because unlike a cruise ship, a transatlantic liner has no ports that can be skipped to make up time lost to harsh seas]; enhanced passenger facilities to keep her passengers happy for 5 days at sea; and enhanced endurance to allow her great range between refueling." All of these mandates created the ship you see today. The need for speed meant her hull had to be more knife prowed than a normal cruise ship's. The need for strength meant her steel plating had to be uncommonly thick and her skeleton unusually dense and super-reinforced. The need to battle high waves meant her superstructure had to be set much farther back on her hull than is common on today's cruise ships. The list goes on and on. In a sense, you could almost say that it was the sea itself that designed *QM2.* They were made for each other.

Inside, *QM2* is laid out in such a way that, even after a weeklong crossing, you might still find new places to explore on board. And it's very unlikely you'll feel hemmed in or claustrophobic, as Heidi feared before she made her first crossing. She never once felt antsy in the spacious and gracious ship, and, in fact, sort of wished the crossing were a few days longer! Our favorite rooms? The Queen's Room ballroom on formal night; the classic Chart Room for drinks before dinner; the forward-facing Commodore Club with its clubby atmosphere; and the forward observation deck on Deck 11, just below the bridge—probably the best spot aboard when sailing out of New York harbor. Throughout, artwork functions both as decoration and for mood enhancement, with iconography that recalls the ocean liner's golden age. The most evocative art of all, though, may be a sound: Way up on *QM2*'s funnel, on the starboard side, is one of the original Tyfon steam whistles from the first *Queen Mary*—the same whistle that sounded when the *Mary* made her first crossing in 1936, now on permanent loan from the city of Long Beach, California. Mounted beside an identical replica, it has a low bass A note that literally shakes the rafters, and if that doesn't put a smile on your face, nothing will.

In reality, *QM2* is really two ships in one. The top categories, the Grill classes, are very luxurious and come with their own specific public rooms, including dining and a lounge, as well as private deck space. Guests in these categories also enjoy all of the rest of the ship along with everyone else booked in non-Grill class accommodations. For the purposes of the ratings in this guide, they are based on the largest part of the ship, the non-Grill categories. It is very safe to presume that the accommodations and dining ratings for the Grill classes would be higher.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$130	162-194	yes	yes	no	yes
Outside	$146	194–269*	yes	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$350	381–2,249*	yes	yes	yes	yes

** Including veranda*

CABINS All of *QM2*'s cabins, from the smallest inside to the largest outside, are decorated in a smooth, contemporary style, with light-blond woods, simple lines, and a clean, uncluttered look. They range from 162-square-foot inside cabins; to roomy, 194-square-foot outside cabins with portholes, minifridges, and large showers; to the truly over-the-top Grand Duplex Suites. Each of the latter is 1,500 to 2,200 square feet and has views of the stern through two-story walls of glass. Heidi is living proof that a family of four can do fine in a standard cabin without a balcony (there are no standard balcony cabins that accommodate families of four), but if you've got a larger budget, the Junior Suites are ideal. They're almost twice as big as a standard and have a huge bathroom with tub, walk-in closet, sitting area, and oversize balcony. Even standard inside and outside cabins, though by no means huge, have a simple elegance and a nice helping of amenities, including terry robes and slippers, fridge, safe, dataport, and interactive TV with e-mail capability. The vast majority of cabins are outside ones with balconies, but to ensure they stay dry in even the roughest seas, many of them are recessed back into the hull with steel bulkheads that block ocean views when seated. All suites and Junior Suites feature Frette linens, flatscreen TVs with

Xbox game systems, personalized stationery, pre-dinner canapés, concierge service, a bottle of champagne on embarkation, and use of the Queens Grill Lounge. Queens Grill Suites get fully stocked bars and other niceties, such as use of a large private deck overlooking the stern on Deck 11 (which is actually also open to Princess Grill guests as well, despite the signage).

There are 30 wheelchair-accessible cabins total in various cabin grades.

PUBLIC AREAS Because *QM2* was designed for comfortable sailing in rough seas, most of her public areas are clustered unusually low, down on decks 2 and 3. At midships, the relatively restrained (and a bit too white) Grand Lobby atrium lets onto two central promenades, decorated with huge Art Deco wall panels. Some are stunning and recall decorated glass panels from the opulent liner *Normandie,* while others are a bit chintzy (they look like they're plastic) and miss the mark.

Getting beyond that one flaw, Deck 2's promenade leads down to the elegant Empire Casino and the too-big-to-be-cozy Golden Lion pub. Up one deck, the very attractive Veuve Clicquot Champagne Bar (serving a variety of champagnes, as well as caviar and foie gras) is decorated with slightly abstracted images of mid-20th-century movie stars and leads into one of the most beautiful rooms on board: The Chart Room, a high-ceilinged space with green-glass Deco maps on one wall and the feel of a great ocean liner. You expect David Niven to come strolling through any minute. By day, both of these rooms are popular hangouts for book readers, letter writers, and daydreamers. Across, on the ship's port side, Sir Samuel's Wine Bar serves coffee, sandwiches, and cakes in the morning and afternoon. Forward, the Royal Court Theatre is a two-deck grand showroom and the principal theatrical venue on board, seconded by the striking Illuminations planetarium farther forward (see "Entertainment," earlier).

In the stern on Deck 3, the Queen's Room ballroom perfectly captures the essence of Cunard style, running the full width of the ship and boasting a high arched ceiling, the largest ballroom dance floor at sea, crystal chandeliers, and a truly royal quality. The G32 nightclub, almost hidden behind silver doors at the head of the Queen's Room, is decorated in industrial style to match its name—"G32" was the number by which *QM2*'s hull was known at the shipyard, before Cunard decided what she'd be called.

Other notable spaces include the Winter Garden on Deck 7, designed to provide an outdoor garden feel on long transatlantic crossings, which somehow misses the mark; and the Commodore Club bar/observation lounge on Deck 9, with its wonderful white-leather chairs, dramatic bow views, and attached Churchill's cigar room. There's also a card room hidden away on Deck 11, just behind the Observation Deck, as well as the remarkable library and bookshop forward on Deck 8 (see "Activities," earlier).

DINING OPTIONS Decor-wise, the Queens Grill and Princess Grill restaurants that serve suite passengers exclusively are the very models of restrained good taste, with a series of elegant blown-glass vases as their one bold touch. The Britannia Restaurant, on the other hand, is a large dramatic space, intended to recall *Queen Mary*'s magnificent first-class restaurant and featuring a vaulted, Tiffany-style glass ceiling, a curved balcony that echoes the shape of the *Mary*'s famous bridge, candlelit tables, soaring pillars, and the largest art tapestry at sea, depicting a liner against the New York skyline. Although it's large, the space is exceedingly glamorous, and designed to feel grand but not overwhelming. The new Britannia Club area has

literally been carved out of a corner of the restaurant, but misses out on the full dramatic height of the room. Still, the 100-seat area succeeds in providing an exclusive, old world-y dining experience, just as the suite guests have in the Grill restaurants. All guests can dine in the cozy and elegant Todd English restaurant for a $30 cover charge for dinner (it's $20 at lunch). King's Court is the ship's casual buffet option, and it becomes several separate (complimentary) specialty dinner restaurants each evening.

See "Dining," p. 151, for more details on the ship's dining experience.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The Canyon Ranch Spa is a two-story complex occupying some 20,000 square feet. At the center of its treatment rooms is a co-ed 15×30-foot aqua-therapy pool whose relaxation gizmos include airbed recliner lounges, neck fountains, a deluge waterfall, an air tub, and body-massage jet benches. There's a hot tub adjacent, and nearby is a thermal suite composed of aromatic steam rooms and an herbal sauna. A salon occupies the top level of the complex, affording tremendous views from its lofty perch. The gym, one deck down, is sort of drab and chopped up, but is perfectly well equipped to make people sweat, with free weights and the latest digitally enhanced climbers, steppers, runners, and rowers.

A more classic exercise is a walk or jog around the wide outdoor Promenade Deck, which encircles the *lo-o-o-n-n-g-g* ship on Deck 7 and allows for beautiful sea views; three times around equals 1 mile. For some shoulder work, there's a pair of golf simulators adjacent to the covered pool solarium on Deck 12. Other dips include a splash pool and hot tubs way up on Deck 13, and several in the tiered stern, including a wading pool, family pool, and play fountain on Deck 6, outside of the children's playrooms. Rounding out the sports options are Ping-Pong, an outdoor golf driving net, basketball, quoits, a paddle-tennis court, and, of course, shuffleboard—this is a transatlantic liner, after all.

6 Disney Cruise Line

P.O. Box 10210, Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830. ✆ **800/951-3532** or 888/325-2500. Fax 407/566-3541. www.disneycruise.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL Hands down, Disney's top of the heap when it comes to family fun. Though Royal Caribbean, Carnival, Celebrity, NCL, and Princess all devote significant attention to kids, it took Disney to create vessels where both kids and adults are really catered to equally, and with style and elegance. If you love Disney, you'll love these two floating theme parks. **Sails to:** Caribbean, The Bahamas, Mexican Riviera.

THE EXPERIENCE Both classic and ultramodern, the line's two ships are like no others in the industry, designed to evoke the grand transatlantic liners but also boasting a handful of truly innovative features, including extralarge cabins for families, several restaurants through which passengers rotate on every cruise, fantastic Disney-inspired entertainment, separate adult pools and lounges, and the biggest kids' facilities at sea. In many ways, the experience is more Disney than it is cruise (for instance, there's no casino); but on the other hand, the ships are surprisingly elegant and well laid out, with the Disney-isms sprinkled around subtly, like fairy dust, amid the Art Deco and Art Nouveau design motifs. Head to toe, inside and out, they're a class act.

Disney's nothing if not organized, so its 3- and 4-night cruises are designed to be combined with a Disney theme park and hotel package to create a weeklong land/sea vacation. You can also book these shorter cruises (as well as weeklong cruises) separately.

Pros

- **Kids' program:** In both the size of the facilities and the range of activities, it's the most extensive at sea.
- **Entertainment:** The line's family-oriented musicals are some of the best onboard entertainment today.
- **Family-style cabins:** All have sofa beds to sleep families of at least three, and the majority have 1½ bathrooms.
- **Innovative dining:** No other ships have diners rotating among three different but equally appealing sit-down restaurants.

Cons

- **No casinos:** If you're a gambler, you're out of luck.
- **Packed pools:** Though there are three pools, they're packed like sardine cans on sunny days, especially the kids' pools.
- **Expensive:** Compared to peers Royal Caribbean, Celebrity, Carnival, and Princess, Disney cruises tend to run a few hundred dollars more. Why? There are only two ships and lots of Disney lovers to fill them.

DISNEY: THE OLD MOUSE & THE SEA

For at least half a century now, Disney has been in the business of merging modern-day expectations and cutting-edge technology with a nostalgic sense of American culture: for childhood innocence, for the frontier, for an idealized turn-of-the-20th-century past, for our mythic heroes. And whether you're a fan or a critic, it's indisputable that at this point the company itself has become a part of our culture. There are probably few people alive—and certainly few Americans—who could fail to recognize Disney's more high-profile creations: Mickey, Donald Duck, Sleeping Beauty, "When You Wish Upon a Star." They've become part of our national identity. And that's why *Disney Magic* and *Disney Wonder* work so well. In nearly every aspect of the onboard experience, they have what most other ships lack: a cultural frame of reference that's recognized by almost everyone.

Though 7-night cruise itineraries are available, many Disney passengers purchase their cruises as part of 7-night seamless land/sea packages that combine 3- or 4-night cruises with 4- or 3-night pre-cruise park stays. Disney buses shuttle passengers

Compared with the other mainstream lines, here's how Disney rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor				✓	
Dining			✓		
Activities			✓		
Children's Program					✓
Entertainment					✓
Service			✓		
Worth the Money				✓	

between Orlando and the ship—about an hour's drive, during which an orientation video imparts some info about the cruise experience. At Disney's swank cruise terminal at Port Canaveral, check-in is usually made easier and faster because guests who have come from the resorts already have their all-purpose, computerized Key to the World cards, which identify them at boarding, get them into their cabins, and serve as their onboard charge cards. (If you're doing just the cruise, you get your Key to the World card when you arrive at the terminal.) You don't have to worry about your luggage, either: It's picked up at the resort and delivered to your cabin soon after you board.

At press time, Disney had just begun construction at Meyer Werft shipyard in Papenburg, Germany, of a pair of **new 128,000-ton ships** called *Disney Dream* and *Disney Fantasy,* scheduled to debut in 2011 and 2012, respectively. The newbuilds will be 50% larger than the *Magic* and *Wonder,* will have 1,250 cabins, and will likely be deployed closer to home while the older ships are sent abroad.

PASSENGER PROFILE

Disney's ships attract a wide mix of passengers, from honeymooners to seniors, but naturally a large percentage is made up of young American families with children (with a smallish number of foreign passengers as well). Because of this, the overall age demographic tends to be younger than that aboard many of the other mainstream ships, with many passengers in their 30s and early to mid-40s. The bulk of the line's passengers are first-time cruisers and many (duh) are families, sometimes extended ones spread across several cabins.

DINING

While Disney's food is average cruise fare, its dining concept sets it apart from the big-ship crowd.

TRADITIONAL The neat catch with Disney's version of set dining is that there are three restaurants that passengers (and their servers) rotate among for dinner over the course of the cruise. On one night, passengers dine on dishes such as roasted duck, garlic-roasted beef tenderloin in a green-peppercorn sauce, or herb-crusted Atlantic cod in *Magic*'s elegant 1930s-era **Lumiere's** restaurant or *Wonder*'s equally elegant nautical-themed **Triton's.** On another night, they enjoy the likes of potato-crusted grouper, baby back pork ribs, or mixed grill in the tropical **Parrot Cay** restaurant. And on the third, they nosh on maple-glazed salmon, pan-fried veal chop, or roasted chicken breast with smashed potatoes at **Animator's Palate,** a bustling eatery with a gimmick: It's a sort of living animation cel, its walls decorated with black-and-white sketches of Disney characters that over the course of the meal gradually become filled in with color. Video screens add to the illusion, and the waiters even disappear at some point to change from black-and-white to full-color vests. It's kinda corny, but fun.

Each restaurant has an early and a late seating, and similar groups are scheduled to rotate together as much as possible (for example, families with young children, adults alone, and families with teens). **Vegetarian options** are offered at all meals, and kosher, halal, low-salt, low-fat, and other **special diets** can be accommodated if you request them when you book your cruise, or soon thereafter; once you're aboard, a chef and head server will meet with you to determine your exact needs. Kids' menus start with appetizers such as fruit cocktail and chicken soup before heading on to such familiar entree items as spaghetti with meat sauce, pizza, hot dogs, hamburger, Jell-O,

and mac-and-cheese. The wine list is fair, and includes bottles by Silverado Vineyards, owned by members of the Disney family (namely Walt Disney's daughter Diane Disney Miller).

Magic's 7-night itineraries have 1 formal night and 1 semiformal night. The rest of the evenings are casual (no jackets or ties necessary for men). *Wonder,* with its shorter itineraries, is casual throughout the cruise, though (on both ships) sports jackets are recommended for men dining in Palo and Lumiere's/Triton's. Overall, on Heidi's last cruise, many went ultracasual: You could always count on a number of people in shorts and flip-flops at dinner (except for Palo).

SPECIALTY Both ships also have a romantic adults-only restaurant called **Palo,** serving Italian specialties such as tortellini stuffed with crabmeat, grilled salmon with risotto, and excellent gourmet pizzas, such as one topped with barbecued chicken, black olives, and spinach. A decent selection of Italian wines is available, and the dessert menu includes a fine chocolate soufflé and a weird-but-tasty dessert pizza. The restaurant itself is horseshoe-shaped and perched way up on Deck 10 to offer a 270-degree view. Service is attentive but not overly formal, and you don't have to dress up, though a jacket for men may be nice. Reservations are essential, and should be made immediately after you board, as the docket fills up fast ($15 per-person cover charge). Palo also serves a great champagne brunch for adults; for $15 enjoy bubbling over an extensive buffet that includes seafood, high-end cheese, fancy pastries, gourmet pizzas (the gorgonzola with grapes pie is excellent), and more.

CASUAL Breakfast and lunch are served in several restaurants, both sit down and buffet. Casual dinners are served on nights 2 through 6 in **Topsiders** *(Magic)* and **Beach Blanket** *(Wonder),* the indoor/outdoor buffet. The chunky wood tables add a nice nautical touch and the food offering is impressive (from Mickey-shaped waffles at breakfast to shrimp cocktail at lunch), but overall, during rush hour, the place gets too packed; considering the size of the ship, it should have definitely been designed as a larger space.

SNACKS & EXTRAS A boon for families with fussy kids, **Pluto's Dog House,** on the main Pool Deck, is always bustling because of its complimentary chicken tenders, fries, burgers, nachos, bratwurst, and other quick snacks served from lunch through the dinner hour. Nearby, **Goofy's Galley** serves up wraps, paninis, fresh fruit, and ice cream with lots of toppings, and there's brick oven pizza at **Pinocchio's Pizzeria.** More highbrow options include champagne brunch (for $15 per person) on all sailings with sea days and an afternoon tea on the *Magic*'s 7-night itineraries ($5 per person). On 7-night cruises, themed dining ops include breakfast with the Disney characters (for picture taking and posting) and afternoon iced tea and cookies with Peter Pan's pal Wendy. The 7-night and longer itineraries offer the "Pirates in the Caribbean" dinner and deck party (the shorter cruises do only the deck party). It starts as a themed dinner in the restaurants, with waiters and passengers in pirate garb, and entree choices such as Black Beard's jumbo crab cakes, then moves up on deck for a party with music and lots of special effects, from black lighting to pirates rappelling from the funnel.

If you, or your kids, are soda junkies, Disney is the only mainstream line that dispenses the stuff for free! You can pour yourself a fountain soda (and then another and another) from a poolside station 24-7 on both ships, which can add up to a substantial savings for you by the end of the cruise (though, your teeth might not be better

for it). There's also the **Cove Café,** serving gourmet coffees (at an extra cost) and light fare for adults (for free!).

The **24-hour room service** menu includes kid favorites such as pizza and cookies.

ACTIVITIES

Unlike on pretty much every other cruise ship, there's no casino of any kind on board, not even a card room. These are family ships. Activities on both vessels include basketball, Ping-Pong, and shuffleboard tournaments; sports trivia contests; weight-loss, health, and beauty seminars; bingo, Pictionary, and other games; wine tastings; and singles mixers (though these family-focused ships aren't great choices for singles). Each ship also has a spa and a gym. There are enrichment activities on all itineraries—though more of them are offered on the longer 7-night routes—including galley tours, backstage theater tours, informal lectures on nautical themes and Disney history as well as current Disney productions, animation and drawing classes, Q & As with the captain, and home entertaining and cooking demos. All these activities are complimentary except wine tasting, which costs a hefty $12 per person. There are also dance classes, movies, and that cruise stalwart the Not-So-Newlywed Game, which Disney calls "Match Your Mate." All itineraries offer a captain's cocktail party with complimentary drinks once per cruise, where the master of the ship (and a bunch of Disney characters) makes an appearance. Sports fanatics can watch "the game" in the **Diversions** sports pub.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

Not surprisingly, with potentially hundreds of kids on any given sailing (1,000 is typical), Disney's kids' facilities are the most extensive at sea, with at least 50 counselors supervising the fun for five age groups between 9am and midnight daily. Nearly half a deck (comprising two huge play spaces and a nursery) is dedicated to kids. The **Oceaneer Club,** for ages 3 to 7 (with separate activities for ages 3–4 and 5–7 when demand warrants it), is a kid-proportioned playroom with a Neverland theme and activities revolving around the Disney Pixar film *Toy Story.* Kids can climb and crawl on the bridge, ropes, and rails of a giant pirate ship, as well as on jumbo-size animals, barrels, and a sliding board; get dressed up from a trunk full of costumes; dance with Snow White and listen to stories by other Disney characters; or play in the kiddie computer room on PlayStations. The interactive **Oceaneer Lab** offers kids ages 8 to 12 a chance to work on computers, learn fun science with microscopes, build from an enormous vat of K'nex (they're like fancy LEGOs), do arts and crafts, hear how animation works, and direct their own TV commercial. A new scavenger hunt is based on the superpopular *High School Musical* movies. Activities are arranged for two groups, ages 8 to 9 and 10 to 12 (they're combined if demand isn't ultrahigh), and both rooms are open until at least midnight, and until 1am on certain days.

The newest kids' space on the *Magic* is called **Ocean Quest.** Built where three conference rooms had been on Deck 2, the hangout space geared to 'tweens 10 to 14 features a replica of the ship's bridge, with real live footage of the real thing upstairs. Kids can sit in a traditional captain's chair and play a simulation game where they can pretend to steer the ship in and out of port. A computer simulator like this was added to the Oceaneer Lab on the *Wonder.* Both ships also have computer and video games, arts and crafts, and movies. Overall, new activities are being introduced all the time to keep the program fresh for the 8-to-17 set. There's also a video arcade, though it's

really cramped compared to most on Royal Caribbean, Princess, and the newest Carnival ships. Kids can eat lunch and dinner with counselors in the Topsider and Beach Blanket buffet restaurants, or one of the other dining outlets, all but the first evening of the cruise.

For teens (13–17), there's a teen hangout called **The Stack** on the *Magic* and **Aloft** on the *Wonder.* Three times the size of the old Common Grounds teen room and more isolated from mom and dad, the teen centers, each with a different design motif, have two separate rooms, one large living-room-like space with video screens for movies and the other a teen disco with a handful of computers with Internet access as well as the popular Guitar Hero music video game. Dance parties, karaoke, trivia games, improv comedy lessons, and workshops on photography are offered for teens on all cruises. There are even more options on 7-night sailings, including learning how to DJ!

Neither ship offers private babysitting services. Instead, the **Flounder's Reef Nursery** for kids ages 3 months to 3 years operates from 6pm to midnight daily, and also for a few hours during the morning and afternoon (hours vary according to the day's port schedule). No other line offers such extensive care for babies. Stocked with toys and decorated with *Little Mermaid*–themed bubble murals and lighting that gives an "under the sea" look, the area also has one-way portholes that allow parents to check on their kids without the little ones seeing them. The space has cribs, and counselors do change diapers (though you should bring your own). The price is $6 per child per hour, and $5 for each additional child in a family (with a 2-hr. minimum). Parents get a tuned beeper when they first check into the nursery, or the kids' program, so that counselors can contact them anywhere on the ship if their child needs them. To avoid suitcases bulging with diapers, a new service allows you to preorder diapers, wipes, and other baby supplies and have them delivered to your cabin on the first day of the cruise.

When the ship calls on **Castaway Cay,** Disney's private island in The Bahamas, kids can head for Scuttle's Cove, a veritable paradise for the 12-and-under set. There are barrels to crawl through, a giant whale-dig site to explore, and more; kids' counselors are on hand to supervise the fun if Mom and Dad want to head to **Serenity Bay,** the adults-only beach. For families who want to play together, there are bike rentals and lots more. For details, see section 1, "The Cruise Lines' Private Islands," in chapter 10.

Upon request, at the guest services desk, Disney offers the complimentary use of Diaper Genie units (for soiled diapers), cribs and playpens, bottle sterilizers, and strollers.

ENTERTAINMENT

Disney's fresh, family-oriented entertainment is some of the very best at sea. On both ships, performances by Broadway-caliber entertainers in the nostalgic Walt Disney Theatre include the Cirque du Soleil–style *Disney Dreams,* a musical medley of Disney classics, taking the audience from *Peter Pan* to *The Lion King;* and the *Golden Mickeys,* a tribute to Disney films through the years that combines song and dance, animated film, and special effects. Depending on the ship and length of the cruise, there's also *Toy Story—The Musical,* based on the original *Toy Story* animated film; *Twice Charmed—An Original Twist on the Cinderella Story; All Aboard: Let the Magic Begin Variety Show;* and the *Remember the Magic* show. On both ships, the stage design allows for lots of magic, with actors flying above the boards and disappearing in and out of trap doors, but the most refreshing thing about these shows is that they have

Disney Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Disney Magic	**Caribbean:** 7-night eastern & western, r/t Port Canaveral (Jan–Apr & Sept–Dec). 10- & 11-night eastern, r/t Port Canaveral (Dec).
Disney Wonder	**Bahamas:** 3- & 4-night (Jan–Apr & Sept–Dec) and 4- & 5-night (May–Aug), r/t Port Canaveral. **Caribbean:** 7-night western, r/t Port Canaveral (Dec).

story lines—rare almost to the point of extinction in the cruise world, which mostly presents musical revues. Besides the stage shows, there's also a wild deck party called Pirates in the Caribbean, with Captain Hook and Captain Mickey playing chase and rappelling from funnels and generally wowing the audience with stunts; the party ends with fireworks fired from the ship.

Family game shows (including a new game show called "On the Nose," a trivia contest called "Mickey Mania," and "Who Wants to Be a Mouseketeer," another trivia contest in the spirit of the millionaire quiz show) and karaoke take place in the **Studio Sea family nightclub.** Adults (18 and older) can take advantage of the **adults-only entertainment area** in the forward part of Deck 3, with its three themed nightclubs: one quiet, with piano music or soft jazz; the second a dance club; and the third, **Diversions,** a combination pub and sports bar, that won't win any design awards (it looks a lot like a TGIF or Houlihan's—yawn). Another nightspot is the **Promenade Lounge,** where live music is featured daily. The **Buena Vista Theatre** shows movies day and evening, and since early 2009, **3-D movies** are shown here and in the Walt Disney Theatre throughout the cruise, though there is one pull-out-the-stop 3-D film with special effects like lasers, fog, streamers, and lighting effects shown once a cruise in the Walt Disney Theatre.

SERVICE

Just like at the parks, Disney staff hail from some 60 countries, including the United States. Service in the dining rooms is efficient and precise, but leans toward friendly rather than formal. The crew keeps the ship exceptionally clean and well maintained. Overall, things run very smoothly.

Though the ships typically sail full and are bustling, the crew seems to remain perpetually good natured and smiley. The "happy to serve" mentality trickles right on up to the officer level, too: The captain personally autographs guests' scrapbooks, photographs, and mementos in a public area at least once per cruise, while top officers participate in the beloved Disney "pin-trading" sessions. So, what makes everyone work so dang hard? Hotel Director Mike Mahendran told Heidi that performance expectations are high, but that it certainly doesn't hurt that crewmembers earn 10% to 30% more than the industry standard, and enjoy other perks that foster productivity.

It's no great surprise that travel agents tell us many guests rate service among the top features of a Disney Cruise.

Services include **laundry** and **dry cleaning** (the ships also have self-service laundry rooms) and 1-hour photo processing. Tips can be charged to your onboard account, which most passengers opt for ($12 per day is suggested), or you can give them out in the traditional method: cash.

Disney Magic • Disney Wonder

Disney Magic *(photo: Disney Cruise Line)*

The Verdict

The only ships on the planet that successfully re-create the grandeur of the classic transatlantic liners, albeit in a modern, Disneyfied way.

Specifications

Size (in tons)	83,000	Year Launched	
Passengers (double occ.)	1,754*	*Magic*	1998
Passenger/Space Ratio	47.3	*Wonder*	1999
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	877/378	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Crew	950	*Magic*	2008
Passenger/Crew Ratio	1.8 to 1	*Wonder*	2006

* ***Note:*** *With children's berths filled, capacity can go as high as 3,325.*

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

★★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	5	Dining Options	4.5
Appearance & Upkeep	5	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	3
Public Comfort/Space	4	Children's Facilities	5
Decor	5	Enjoyment Factor	5

These long, proud-looking ships carry 1,754 passengers at the rate of two per cabin, but because Disney is a family company and its ships were built expressly to carry three, four, and five people in virtually every cabin, the ship could theoretically carry a whopping 3,325 passengers. Although numbers rarely reach that high, Hotel Director Mike Mahendran told Heidi they rarely carry fewer than 2,500 passengers. Though service is a high point of a Disney cruise and the ships are well laid out, these high numbers mean certain areas of the ship will feel crowded at times, namely the kids' pool area, the buffet restaurants, and the photo gallery and shops after dinner. Overall, though, the ships are well laid out and frequently updated and upgraded, most recently the *Wonder* in 2006 and the *Magic* in 2008.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$106	184–214	yes	yes	yes	yes
Outside	$164	226–268	yes	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$244	259–1,029	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS The Disney ships offer the family-friendliest cabins at sea, with standard accommodations equivalent to the suites or demisuites on most ships—they're about 25% larger than the industry standard. All of the 877 cabins have at least a sitting area with a sofa bed to sleep families of three (or four if you put two small children on the sofa bed). Some cabins also have one or two pull-down bunks to sleep families of four

or five. Nearly half have private verandas. One-bedroom suites have private verandas and sleep four or five comfortably; two-bedroom suites sleep seven. Outside cabins that don't have verandas have jumbo-size porthole windows. ***Note:*** Due to the beds being lower to the ground than on most other ships, you may not be able to stow your suitcases there and will have to resort to taking up precious closet space with luggage.

The decor is virtually identical from cabin to cabin, combining modern design with nostalgic ocean-liner elements such as a steamer-trunk armoire for kids, globe- and telescope-shaped lamps, map designs on the bedspreads, and a framed black-and-white 1930s shot of Mr. and Mrs. Walt Disney aboard the fabled ocean liner *Rex*. Warm wood tones predominate, with Art Deco touches in the metal and glass fittings and light fixtures. The majority of cabins have two bathrooms—a sink and toilet in one and a shower/tub combo and a sink in the other (both of them compact, though with ample shelf space). This is something you won't find in any other standard cabin industrywide, and it's a great boon for families. All cabins have a minifridge (empty), hair dryer, safe, TV, tub/shower combo, sitting area, and lots of storage space. The high-quality H2O bathroom toiletries are a perk, especially the thick and creamy moisturizer and the tingly shower gel.

One-bedroom suites are done up with wood veneer in a definite Deco mood. Sliding frosted-glass French doors divide the living room from the bedroom, which has a large-screen TV, queen-size bed (which can be split to make two twins), chair and ottoman, dressing room, makeup table, and whirlpool tub in the bathroom. A second guest bathroom is located off the living room, which also has a bar and a queen-size sofa bed. The veranda extends the length of both rooms. Two-bedroom and Royal suites are also available.

Sixteen cabins are fitted for wheelchair users.

PUBLIC AREAS Both ships have several theaters and lounges, including an adults-only area with three separate venues: a piano/jazz lounge, disco, and sports-pub-cum-karaoke bar. There's also a family-oriented entertainment lounge called Studio Sea for game shows, karaoke, and dancing; the Promenade Lounge for classic pop music in the evenings; and a 24-hour Internet cafe. The Cove Café is a comfy place for gourmet coffees (for a price) or cocktails in a relaxed setting with books, magazines, Internet stations, Wi-Fi access, and TVs. A 270-seat cinema shows mostly recent-release Disney movies; both ships have a jumbo 336-square-foot screen attached to the forward funnel outside on Deck 9 that shows classic Disney animated films and other stuff. The children's facilities, as you'd expect, are the largest of any ship at sea (see "Children's Program," earlier, for details).

Throughout, both ships have some of the best artwork at sea, owing to Disney's vast archive of animation cels, production sketches, costume studies, and inspirational artwork, featuring characters we've all grown up with. Other art—notably the "Disney Cruise Line Seaworthy Facts" near the photo shop and A-to-Z of seagoing terms near the theater—was created specifically for the ships and gets a big, big thumbs-up. Canned music pumped into the public areas and corridors tends toward big-band music and crooner tunes or surf-type pop.

DINING OPTIONS Disney's unique rotation dining setup has guests sampling three different restaurants at dinner over the course of their cruise, with an adults-only specialty restaurant also available, by reservation only (see "Dining," earlier in this section). At breakfast and lunch, the buffet-style spread in *Magic*'s Topsider and *Wonder*'s Beach Blanket restaurants offers deli meats, cheeses, and rice and vegetable dishes, as

well as a carving station, a salad bar, and a dessert table with yummy chocolate chip cookies. Though the culinary offerings are fine, the layout and tiny size of the place are not. During the morning rush, for example, it's tough to squeeze through the place, let alone with kids and a tray full of breakfast. Be prepared to dine elsewhere if the place is packed.

Options for afternoon noshing poolside include Pinocchio's Pizzeria; Pluto's Dog House for hot dogs, hamburgers, chicken tenders, fries, and more; and Goofy's Galley for wraps, fruit, and ice cream. There's 24-hour room service from a limited menu, but no midnight buffet unless you count the spread offered at the evening deck party held once per cruise and the dessert buffet offered once on 7-night itineraries. Instead, hors d'oeuvres are served to passengers in and around the bars at about midnight.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The Pool Deck of each ship has three pools: Mickey's Kids' Pool, shaped like the mouse's big-eared head, with a great big white-gloved Mickey hand holding up a snaking yellow slide (this pool can get croooww-ded!); Goofy's Family Pool, where adults and children can mingle; and the Quiet Cove Adult Pool, with whirlpools, gurgling waterfalls, teak deck and lounge chairs with plush cushions, a poolside bar, and a coffee spot called Cove Café. On sunny days, the kids' pool will feel like a sardine can—watch those cannon balls! A consolation prize for families with young children, adjacent is a splash pool with circulating water for diaper-wearing babies and toddlers. It's the only one at sea, as the official party line across the board is no diaper-wearing children (and that includes pull-ups and swim diapers) are allowed in any pool, wading or adult, for hygiene reasons. On both ships there is now a new larger toddler pool that sports interactive fountains and splash zones.

Just beyond the adult pool area at the stern is a spa and gym. The Steiner-managed Vista Spa & Salon is impressive, with attractive tiled treatment rooms and a thermal suite with a sauna, steam room, misting shower, and heated contoured tile chaise longues. Among the many treatments is a selection geared to teens. Both ships' spas have been remodeled and three spa villas were added. Each one is an indoor treatment suite that's connected to a private outdoor veranda with a personal hot tub, an open-air shower, and a chaise longue. Sounds great, yes, but renting one isn't cheap! They can be reserved for one person or couples. A 50-minute massage for one in a spa villa, for example, is $199 and it includes 55 more minutes in the villa to enjoy tea, a soak in the hot tub, and what Disney calls a "foot bathing ceremony." (The couples' version of this villa treatment is $449 per couple and includes a pair of 50-min. massages and 70 min. to loll about the villa afterward.) Both ships have an outdoor Sports Deck with basketball and paddle tennis. There are also shuffleboard and Ping-Pong, and joggers and walkers can circuit the Promenade Deck, which is generally unobstructed (though the forward, enclosed section may be closed off when the ship is arriving and departing port because it's adjacent to the anchor mechanisms).

7 Holland America Line

300 Elliott Ave. W., Seattle, WA 98119. ✆ **877/724-5425** or 206/281-3535. Fax 800/628-4855. www.hollandamerica.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL In business since 1873, Holland America (HAL) has managed to hang on to more of its seafaring history and tradition than any line today except Cunard. It offers a moderately priced, classic, and casual yet refined cruise experience. **Sails to:** Caribbean, Panama Canal, Alaska, Mexico, Hawaii,

Canada/New England (plus Asia, Australia/New Zealand, Europe, South America, Africa).

THE EXPERIENCE Holland America is a classy operation, offering all-around appealing cruises with a touch of old-world elegance and such cushy amenities as plush bedding and flat-panel TVs with DVD players in all cabins. Though the line has been retooling itself to attract younger passengers and families, it still caters mostly to older folks, and so generally offers a more sedate and stately experience than other mainstream lines, plus excellent service for the money. Its fleet, which until a few years ago consisted of midsize, classically styled ships, is in the process of being supersized (relatively speaking), and the new *Eurodam* and recent Vista-class megaships are a bit bolder in their color palette. New or old, the vessels are all well maintained and have excellent (and remarkably similar) layouts that ease passenger movement. Throughout the ships' public areas you'll see flowers that testify to Holland's place in the floral trade, Indonesian touches that evoke the country's relationship with its former colony, and seafaring memorabilia that often hearkens back to Holland America's own history.

Pros

- **Great service:** HAL's primarily Indonesian and Filipino staff is exceptionally gracious and friendly.
- **Traditional classic ambience:** Overall, the line's ships are classy, with impressive art collections and a touch of traditional ocean-liner ambience. The new Signature-class *Eurodam* retains most of the line's traditional features while introducing a very modern Northern European design sense.
- **Chocolate!** The once-per-cruise dessert extravaganzas and the occasional spreads of sweets guarantee you'll gain a few pounds.

Cons

- **Sleepy nightlife:** While there are always a few stalwarts and a couple of busyish nights, these aren't party ships. If you're big on late-night dancing and barhopping, you may find yourself partying mostly with the entertainment staff.
- **Fairly homogenous passenger profile:** Although younger faces are starting to pepper the mix (especially on 7-night cruises to warm-weather destinations), most HAL passengers still tend to be low-key, fairly sedentary 55-plus North American couples.

HOLLAND AMERICA: GOING DUTCH

One of the most famous shipping companies in the world, Holland America Line was founded in 1873 as the Nederlandsch-Amerikaansche Stoomvaart Maatschappij (Netherlands-American Steamship Company). Its first ocean liner, the original *Rotterdam,* took her maiden, 15-day voyage from the Netherlands to New York City in 1872. By the early 1900s, the company had been renamed Holland America and was one of the major lines transporting immigrants from Europe to the United States, as well as providing passenger/cargo service between Holland and the Dutch East Indies via the Suez Canal. During World War II, the company's headquarters moved from Nazi-occupied Holland to Dutch-owned Curaçao, then the site of a strategic oil refinery, and after the war the company forged strong links with North American interests. The line continued regular transatlantic crossings up until 1971, and then turned to offering cruises full time. In 1989, it was acquired by Carnival Corporation, which improved the line's entertainment and cuisine while maintaining its overall character

Compared with the other mainstream lines, here's how HAL rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor				✓	
Dining				✓	
Activities			✓		
Children's Program		✓			
Entertainment				✓	
Service					✓
Worth the Money					✓

and sense of history. Today, most of HAL's vessels are named for other classic vessels in the line's history—*Rotterdam,* for example, is the sixth HAL ship to bear that name—and striking paintings of classic HAL ships by maritime artist Stephen Card appear in the stairways on every ship. But HAL isn't just about history: Over the past few years, it's upgraded its ships with what it called the "Signature of Excellence" initiative. All staterooms now have DVD players and flat-panel plasma TVs, extrafluffy towels, terry-cloth bathrobes, massage shower heads, lighted magnifying makeup mirrors, salon-quality hair dryers, triple-sheeted mattresses, and 100% Egyptian cotton bed linens. Each ship also got a demonstration kitchen for interactive programs about food and wine; a combo lounge, library, coffee shop, and Internet cafe called the Explorations Café; and enhanced spa and kids facilities.

Though Holland America offers cruises in every major region covered in this book, it's particularly strong in **Alaska,** where it operates one of the state's most extensive land-tour operations.

Holland America's 2,044-passenger, 86,000-ton *Eurodam* launched in July 2008 as the first vessel in the line's new **Signature class.** A second Signature-class ship, named *Nieuw Amsterdam,* is being built at Italy's Fincantieri shipyards and will launch in spring 2010.

PASSENGER PROFILE

For years, HAL was known for catering to an almost exclusively older crowd, with most passengers in their 70s on up. Today, following intense efforts to attract younger passengers, about 25% of the line's guests are under age 55 (with the average age being 57), with a few young families peppering the mix, especially in summers and during holiday weeks. While the average age skews a bit lower on the newer Signature-class and Vista-class ships, HAL just isn't Carnival or Disney, and its older ships especially were designed with older folks in mind. On cruises longer than a week, there's no shortage of canes, walkers, and wheelchairs.

Passengers tend to be amiable, low key, and amenable to dressing up—you'll see lots of tuxedos and evening gowns on formal nights. Though you'll see some people walking laps on the Promenade Deck, others taking advantage of the ships' gyms, and some taking athletic or semiadventurous shore excursions, these aren't terribly active cruises, and passengers overall tend to be sedentary. HAL has a very high repeat-passenger rate, so many of the people you'll see aboard will have sailed with the line before.

Parties for solo travelers (only 30–40 of whom tend to be on any particular cruise) encourage mixing, and you can ask to be seated with other solo passengers at dinner.

On cruises of 10 nights or longer, gentlemen hosts sail aboard to provide company for single women, joining them at dinner as well as serving as dance partners.

DINING

Much improved over the years, Holland America's cuisine is fine, but hardly memorable. On a recent cruise, meals in the main restaurant were hit-and-miss, ranging from so-so to pretty good. The line's making a push to offer more regional dishes to match where a given ship is sailing: salmon and other wild local seafood on Alaska cruises; chicken mole or guava-stuffed chicken on Mexico cruises; and jerk chicken or West Indian lassi soup in the Caribbean, plus local produce like chayote, breadfruit, and guava. The nonadventurous can still order menu standards such as New York strip steak and Caesar salad.

TRADITIONAL In the line's lovely formal restaurants, appetizers may include prawns in spicy wasabi cocktail sauce, deep-fried hazelnut brie, and escargot; the soup-and-salad course always includes several options, from a plain house salad and minestrone to a chilled raspberry bisque and spicy two-bean soup; and main courses are heavy on **traditional favorites** such as broiled lobster tail, grilled salmon, beef tenderloin, roast turkey, seared tuna steak, grilled pork chop, and filet mignon, along with a **regional specialty** or two.

Those wanting something less substantial can opt for lighter dishes such as grilled fish or chicken, and fresh fruit medley. A few entrees on most dinner menus are marked as signature dishes recommended by Master Chef Rudi Sodamin, and include the likes of a salmon tartare with avocado appetizer and, as a main course, chicken *cordon bleu.* Some vegetarian entrees are available on the main menu, but you can also ask for a **full vegetarian menu,** with half a dozen entrees and an equal number of appetizers, soups, and salads. (Don't miss the tofu stroganoff and celery-and-stilton soup if they're offered—yum.) Children can enjoy tried-and-true staples such as pizza, hot dogs, burgers with fries, chicken fingers, and tacos, plus chef's specials such as pasta and fish and chips.

In 2008, Holland America introduced its **As You Wish Dining** program, similar to Princess's Personal Choice program. At booking, passengers are asked to choose either traditional early or late seating dining (at the same table nightly, served on one level of the ship's main restaurant) or a completely flexible schedule (offered from 5:15 to 9pm nightly on the restaurant's other level). Guests opting for flexible dining can make reservations during the day or just show up whenever they like.

SPECIALTY Aboard every vessel, the intimate **Pinnacle Grill** restaurant offers a menu of mostly steaks, chops, and fish. Options may include such dishes as Dungeness crab cakes, pan-seared rosemary chicken with cranberry chutney, wild-mushroom ravioli with pesto cream sauce, or lamb rack chops with drizzled mint sauce, plus premium beef cuts. All entrees are complemented with regional wines from Chateau Ste. Michelle, Canoe Ridge, Willamette Valley Vineyards, and others. The cover charge is $30 per person for dinner and $15 for lunch. On a recent *Statendam* outing, the service was top rate and the food exceeded our expectations. Don't miss the opportunity to dine here at least once per cruise. Make reservations as early as possible when you come aboard. In addition to dinners, alternative restaurants may be open for lunch on sea days.

The new *Eurodam* has further opened up the dining choices, with the really outstanding Pan-Asian **Tamarind** ($15 at dinner; no charge for dim sum at lunch) and

Italian **Canaletto** (no extra cost), which takes over a portion of the buffet each evening. **Slice,** *Eurodam*'s 24-hour pizzeria, makes custom pizzas with toppings ranging from mussels to eggplant, on standard or whole-wheat crust. The ship also offers **flexible cross-ordering;** for example, guests dining in the buffet can order selections from the dining room during dinner service. In addition, the new spa staterooms come with special **healthy room service menus** and the new cabanas with light breakfast and lunch selections.

CASUAL As has become industry standard, **casual dining** is available each night in the ships' buffet-style Lido restaurants, which also serve breakfast and lunch. They're some of the best-laid-out buffets at sea, with separate stations for salads, desserts, drinks, and so on, keeping lines and crowding to a minimum. Diners here are offered open seating from about 6 to 8pm. Tables are set with linens and a pianist may provide background music, but service is buffet style, with waiters on hand to serve beverages. The set menu features the basics: Caesar salad, shrimp cocktail, or fresh-fruit-cup appetizer; French onion soup; freshly baked dinner rolls; and entree choices, which may include salmon, sirloin steak, roast chicken, and lasagna, served with a vegetable of the day and a baked potato or rice pilaf. Most main dishes are similar to what you'll find in the main restaurant that evening. At lunch, the buffet restaurants offer pasta, salads, stir-fry, burgers, and usually an ethnic option, such as an Indian shrimp curry, sushi, or Dutch crepes. Pizza and ice cream stations are open until late afternoon. Out on the Lido Deck, by the pool, a **grill** serves hamburgers, hot dogs, veggie and turkey burgers, and pizza, between about 11:30am and 6pm. A **taco bar** nearby offers all the fixings for tacos or nachos, and it's generally open about the same hours. Once a week, the Lido also hosts a **barbecue buffet dinner.**

SNACKS & EXTRAS Once per cruise, a special **Royal Dutch High Tea** features teatime snacks and music provided by the ships' string trio, making it one of the most truly "high" among the generally pretty low teas offered on mainstream lines. On other days, a more standard **afternoon tea** has white-gloved waiters passing around teeny sandwiches, scones, and cookies in the dining room or one of the main lounges. We're told a new Indonesian Tea and Coffee Ceremony will also be offered once a cruise and feature such goodies as spring rolls, sweet rice balls, and coconut. Pizza, soft ice cream, and frozen yogurt round out the afternoon offerings.

Free hot canapés are served in some of the bars/lounges during the cocktail hour, and free iced tea is served on deck, one of many thoughtful touches provided at frequent intervals by the well-trained staff. The **Explorations Café** has a specialty coffee bar.

Each evening around midnight, a spread of snacks is available in the Lido restaurant, and at least once during each cruise the dessert chefs get to go wild for a midnight **Dessert Extravaganza.** Cakes are decorated with humorous themes, marzipan animals guard towering chocolate castles, and trays are heavy with chocolate-covered strawberries, truffles, cream puffs, and other sinful things.

Room service is available 24 hours a day and is typically efficient and gracious. A plus, the breakfast options include eggs and meats, not just pastries and cereals like most mainstream ships offer. You can also order room service on the final morning of the cruise, another rarity.

ACTIVITIES

Though varied and fun, HAL's onboard activities tend to be low key. You can take ballroom dance lessons; take an informal class in photography; play bingo or bridge; sit

in on a trivia game or Pictionary tournament; participate in Ping-Pong, golf-putting, basketball free-throw, or volleyball tournaments; take a gaming lesson in the casino or an aerobics class at the gym; take a self-guided iPod tour of the ship's art collection or a backstage theater tour; go high-toned at a wine tasting; or go low-toned at the goofy games poolside or in a lounge. During the "Seaquest" game on a recent 14-night cruise, a group of mostly senior passengers enthusiastically slipped off their bras and dropped their drawers in the name of friendly competition—the team that deposited more undergarments on the show lounge stage won. The place was a sea of geriatric goofballs tottering around in their boxers and briefs, crumbled trousers in hand. Some cruises also feature model shipbuilding contests in which you can use only junk you can find around the ship, with seaworthiness tested in one of the ship's hot tubs.

Each ship has a great **Explorations Café,** which is a combo Internet center, coffee bar, and library. Comfy lounge chairs come equipped with music stations and headphones. Generous shelves of books, DVDs, and games line the walls, and a magazine stand holds current issues of popular magazines plus the latest edition of various newspapers, when the ship can get them. If you're a crossword buff you can tackle the *New York Times*' crossword puzzles embedded under glass in the room's cafe tables (wax pencils are provided). Explorations also functions as the Internet cafe, but passengers toting their Wi-Fi–enabled laptops can take advantage of wireless hotspots here and throughout the ship. The ships' **Culinary Arts Centers** offer free cooking demos and more intimate, hands-on cooking classes (available for a charge). The center is also used for other demos, such as flower arranging. Cooking demos usually happen twice per 7-day cruise; go early to get a front-row seat, or sit in the back and watch the food preparation on the flat-panel TVs around the room.

On 7-night Alaska cruises, Native artists demonstrate traditional arts such as ivory and soapstone carving, basket weaving, and mask making as part of the line's **Artists in Residence Program,** created under the auspices of Anchorage's Alaska Native Heritage Center. Another program offered during visits to Glacier Bay brings a member of the Huna tribe aboard to talk about the land the Huna have called home for centuries. In Hawaii and Mexico, cultural dancers perform for passengers.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

Holland America isn't Disney, but they're trying harder to cater to families with children. If there are more than about 30 kids aboard, activities are programmed for three age brackets (3–7, 8–12, and 13–17), and there's always at least one counselor on board every sailing, and more when demand warrants. You'll find the most children on cruises during summers and holiday weeks. At these times, there may be as many as 300 to 400 kids aboard the line's newer ships, especially in the Caribbean, though around 100 to 200 is typical overall. When there are fewer than 20 or 30 kids, a two-tiered Club HAL program is offered—children 3 to 12 in one group, teens in another—on a limited basis, generally about 6 hours on sea days and even fewer hours on port days. On cruises with more children, activities are offered for three or more age groupings and for much longer hours. Typically, each evening kids receive a program detailing the next day's activities, which may include arts and crafts, cooking classes, youth sports tournaments, movies and videos, scavenger hunts, PlayStations, disco for teens, storytelling for younger kids, miniature golf, charades, bingo, Ping-Pong, and pizza, ice-cream, and pajama parties. The playrooms typically operate on a limited schedule on port days, and in the Caribbean the line offers kids' activities on

its private beach, Half Moon Cay (see section 1, "The Cruise Lines' Private Islands," in chapter 10). All the ships have **dedicated playrooms** and **separate teen centers** with video screens and a dance floor; the Statendam-class ships even have a totally cool outdoor space sequestered away on a top deck for teens called the Oasis, a beachlike setting complete with a waterfall and chaise longues. Otherwise, the playrooms are bright and cheerful, though they lack the ball jumps, padded climbing and crawling areas, and fanciful decor that make kids' facilities aboard Disney, Royal Caribbean, Princess, NCL, and Celebrity so compelling.

Families traveling with HAL tend to be multigenerational, and the line emphasizes activities for the whole family rather than kids only. Many onboard activities are geared for family fun or competition, especially in the Caribbean.

Group babysitting in the playroom is offered between 10pm and midnight for $5 per hour for ages 3 to 12. In-cabin babysitting is also offered, assuming a crewmember is available. The cost is $8 an hour for the first child (minimum age 12 weeks), and $5 per hour for additional kids. Inquire at the guest services desk.

Children must be 12 weeks or older to sail aboard.

ENTERTAINMENT

Don't expect HAL's shows to knock your socks off, but hey, at least they're trying. Each ship features small-scale **Vegas-style shows,** with laser lights and lots of glimmer and shimmer. Overall, though, you'll find better-quality entertainment from the soloists, trios, and quartets playing jazz, pop, and light-classical standards around the ship.

Recent-release movies are shown an average of twice a day in an onboard cinema, with free popcorn available for the full movie effect. There's also a **crew talent show** once a week in which crewmembers (Indonesians one week, Filipinos the next) present songs and dances from their home countries. **Passenger-participation shows** are a different animal, with the crowd-pleasing *American Idol*–style contest called Superstar featuring passenger crooners being critiqued by a staff of judges.

Aboard each ship, one of the lounges becomes a disco in the evening, with a small live band generally playing before dinner and a DJ taking over for after-dinner dancing. The new Signature-class and Vista-class ships have dedicated discos; on the other ships, the Crow's Nest lounge goes disco in the evenings.

SERVICE

Holland America is one of the few cruise lines that maintains a real training school (a land-based school in Indonesia known in HAL circles as "ms Nieuw Jakarta") for the selection and training of staffers, resulting in service that's efficient, attentive, and genteel. The soft-spoken, primarily Indonesian and Filipino staffers smile more often than not and will frequently remember your name after only one introduction, though they struggle occasionally with their English. (Be cool about it: Remember, you probably can't speak even a word of Bahasa Indonesia or Tagalog.) During lunch, a uniformed employee may hold open the door of a buffet, and at dinnertime, stewards who look like vintage hotel pages walk through the public rooms ringing a chime to formally announce the dinner seatings.

Like many other lines these days, HAL now automatically adds **gratuities** to passengers' shipboard accounts, at the rate of $11 per day, adjustable up or down at your discretion. A 15% service charge is automatically added to bar bills and dining room wine accounts.

Holland America Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Amsterdam	**U.S. West Coast & British Columbia:** 3-night, Los Angeles to Vancouver (Apr). 1-night, Vancouver to Seattle (May). 4-night, r/t Seattle (Sept). **Alaska:** 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Seattle (May). 14-night Gulf of Alaska (May–Sept). **Mexican Riviera:** 6-night, r/t San Diego (Dec).
Eurodam	**Caribbean:** 7-night eastern, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Jan–Mar, Oct–Dec). **Canada/New England:** 10-night, north- & southbound between New York & Québec City (Sept). **Atlantic Coast:** 10-night, Québec City to Fort Lauderdale (Oct).
Maasdam	**Panama Canal:** 14- & 28-night, west- & eastbound between Fort Lauderdale & San Diego (Jan–Apr). **Caribbean:** 14-night southern, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Apr & Nov). 10- & 11-night southern, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Oct–Dec). **Atlantic Coast:** 15-night, Fort Lauderdale to Montréal (May). 13-night, Montréal to Fort Lauderdale (Oct). **Canada/New England:** 7-night (May–Sept) & 14-night (May–Aug), north- & southbound between Boston & Montréal.
Nieuw Amsterdam	**Caribbean:** 7-night eastern & western, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Nov–Dec).
Noordam	**Caribbean:** 10-night (Jan–Mar, May, Nov–Dec) & 20-night (Jan–Apr) southern, r/t Fort Lauderdale.
Oosterdam	**Mexican Riviera:** 7-night (Jan, Mar–Apr, Oct–Dec) & 11-night (Jan), r/t San Diego. 12-night, r/t Vancouver (Sept). **Sea of Cortez/Baja:** 10- & 14-night, r/t San Diego (Apr). **U.S. West Coast & British Columbia:** 4-night, San Diego to Vancouver (May). 1-night, Vancouver to Seattle (May). 1-night, Seattle to Vancouver (Sept). 5-night, Vancouver to San Diego (Sept). **Alaska:** 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Seattle (May–Sept).
Rotterdam	**U.S. West Coast & British Columbia:** 4-night, San Diego to Vancouver (May). 1-night, Vancouver to Seattle (May). 1-night, Seattle to Vancouver (Sept). **Alaska:** 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Seattle (May–Sept).
Ryndam	**Caribbean:** 7-night (Jan, Mar–Apr, Oct–Dec) & 14-night (Jan, Mar–Apr) western, r/t Tampa. **Cruise to Nowhere:** 3-night, r/t Tampa (Feb). **Panama Canal:** 17- or 21-night, west- or eastbound between Tampa and San Diego or Vancouver (Apr & Sept). **U.S. West Coast & British Columbia:** 4-night, San Diego to Vancouver (May). 4-night, Vancouver to San Diego (Sept). **Alaska:** 7-night Gulf of Alaska, north- & southbound between Vancouver and Seward/Anchorage (May–Sept). 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Vancouver (Sept).
Statendam	**Panama Canal:** 18-night, San Diego to Fort Lauderdale (Mar). 17- or 21-night, Tampa to San Diego or Vancouver (Apr & Sept). 19- or 15-night, Vancouver or San Diego to Fort Lauderdale (Sept). 14-night, west- or eastbound between Fort Lauderdale and San Diego (Oct–Dec). **Caribbean**: 14-night southern, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Apr). **U.S. West Coast & British Columbia:** 4-night, San Diego to Vancouver (May). 4-night, Vancouver to San Diego (Sept). **Alaska:** 7-night Gulf of Alaska, north- & southbound between Vancouver and Seward/Anchorage (May–Sept). 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Vancouver (Sept).
Veendam	**Bermuda:** 7-night, r/t New York (Apr–Oct).
Volendam	**Alaska:** 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Vancouver (May–Sept). **U.S. West Coast & British Columbia:** 1-night, Seattle to Vancouver (Sept).
Westerdam	**Caribbean:** 7-night (Jan–Mar & Nov–Dec) & 14-night (Jan–Mar) southern, 7-night western (Jan–Mar), 7-night eastern (Feb–Mar & Nov–Dec), all r/t Fort Lauderdale.
Zaandam	**Hawaii:** 15-night (Jan–Apr), 21-night (Apr) & 14-night (Oct–Dec), all r/t San Diego. 16- & 17-night, r/t Vancouver (Apr). 16-night, Vancouver to San Diego (Oct). **Sea of Cortez/Baja:** 9- & 10-night, r/t San Diego (Feb–Mar). **U.S. West Coast & British Columbia:** 6-night, San Diego to Vancouver (Apr). 1-night, Vancouver to Seattle (May). **Alaska:** 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Seattle (May–Sept).

Ship	Itineraries
Zuiderdam	**Panama Canal:** 10-night, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Jan–Apr & Oct–Dec). 14- or 18-night, Fort Lauderdale to San Diego or Vancouver (Apr). 16- or 19-night, Vancouver or San Francisco to Fort Lauderdale (Sept). **U.S. West Coast & British Columbia:** 4-night, San Diego to Vancouver (May). 3-night, Vancouver to San Francisco (Sept). **Alaska:** 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Vancouver (May–Sept).

Only the Vista-class ships (and the *Prinsendam*) come with minifridges standard in cabins. On the other vessels, they can be rented for a few bucks a day (inquire before your cruise if you're interested). All cabins have complimentary fruit baskets on embarkation day. An early-boarding program allows guests to get aboard in the port of embarkation as early as 11:30am, when some lounges and facilities will be open for their use, although cabins generally won't be ready until 1pm. All suite guests have access to a one-touch **24-hour concierge service** and concierge lounge.

Onboard services on every ship in the fleet include **laundry** and **dry cleaning.** Each ship—except the new Signature- and Vista-class ships, oddly enough—also maintains several **self-service laundry rooms** with irons.

Eurodam

The Verdict

More modern European and less Holland America–royal in feeling, *Eurodam* is a sleek ship for all nations, a logical evolution that spices up HAL's traditionalism with new, sophisticated elements.

Eurodam *(photo: Holland America Line)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	86,700	Crew	929
Passengers (Double occ.)	2,104	Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.3 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio	41.2	Year Launched	2008
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	1,052/708	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	N/A

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

★★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	5	Dining Options	5
Appearance & Upkeep	5	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4
Public Comfort/Space	4	Children's Facilities	3
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	4.5

Eurodam is Holland America's largest ship to date and the first of at least two Signature-class vessels. A little larger than the Vista-class ships, she has an additional deck and 63 more staterooms. She's as large as HAL is prepared to go, the biggest ship that can sail through the Panama Canal and, HAL executives feel, the biggest that can sustain the premium experience. HAL has been clear about its intentions to draw from a

worldwide market, and the ship reflects this with its stylish, tailored Northern European decor, with much of the artwork reflecting the Dutch Golden Age.

Most of the line's signature features remain, with many of the new elements on the upper decks, where HAL has, for the first time, placed staterooms. Among the new features are the spa staterooms with special amenities, special room service, and a dedicated concierge; the graceful, tentlike cabanas by the Lido pool and in the Retreat; and the new Pan-Asian Tamarind and Italian Canaletto restaurants.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$78	170–200	yes	yes	no	yes
Outside	$93	185–254	yes	yes	some	yes
Suite	$200	389–1,138	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS With *Eurodam,* HAL's British country house style moves to sophisticated modern Northern Europe, with a more tailored look and rich, understated olives and golds, woods that run the gamut from blond to cherry, and more nickel and stainless steel than brass. Standard staterooms are very much like those on Vista-class ships, rated among the best in the industry. All categories have Signature of Excellence features, from Euro-top beds to Egyptian cotton towels, flatscreen TVs and DVD players (DVDs are free for suite occupants, $3 each for others), massaging shower heads, and Elemis toiletries. Closets are sufficient and well planned, but drawer space seems rather scarce until you realize that there are drawers under the beds. ***Tip:*** The veranda staterooms on Deck 4 have a bit more outside space than others.

Suite passengers have perks including the private Neptune Lounge with its personal concierge, large-screen TV, library, sofas, Wi-Fi, minibar, and refreshments. Deluxe and Superior Verandah Suites have sitting and dressing areas, double sinks, whirlpool tubs, and separate showers.

The 56 spa staterooms and suites have different decor, soothing earth tones accented with fresh green and fernlike tracings on the linens. The 10 Deluxe Verandah Ocean-view rooms on the Observation Deck have scalloped balconies and floor-to-ceiling windows, but these are essentially French balconies and have no outdoor furniture.

All spa staterooms have a Greenhouse Spa concierge, although there is not a spa package or special discount that goes with these accommodations. They also have a direct connection to the spa, special bath amenities including aromatherapy bath salts and a loofah, and organic linens. Each is also equipped with a fitness DVD, a yoga mat, and pedometers, along with a water feature to generate soothing sounds. At turndown, the spa staterooms receive herb-infused organic chocolates. They also have a special healthy room service menu with fresh squeezed fruit and vegetable juices, egg white omelets, turkey bacon, and soy patties among the options.

Thirty cabins, across the categories, offer wheelchair access.

PUBLIC AREAS On *Eurodam* the three-deck 890-seat Mainstage showroom, with descending orchestra pit and revolving stage to showcase Vegas-style shows, is flanked by a number of bars and lounges. The Northern Lights disco and bar are also to one side of the casino; however, the nightly piano bar seems more popular with HAL guests, as are the blackjack tables in the casino, which benefits from the addition of a

small adjoining bar. The dedicated movie theater, complete with popcorn and very cushy leather seats, also sees good use.

The three-deck atrium is really spectacular, with a central backlit fiber-optic sculpture that changes color and a gorgeous green glass staircase; three sides reach into the top level of the Ocean Bar.

One of the nicest features of Holland America ships is their nooks and crannies, little private spaces and tables where peace and privacy are easy to find, and *Eurodam* is no exception. There are comfortable corners in the Explorer's Lounge, with its excellent after-dinner libations, specialty coffees, and hand-dipped chocolates. The library also has some relaxing retreats, along with a thousand novels and a nice supply of nonfiction.

Less quiet but also delightful, the Sports Bar departs from the European decor to give a very amusing salute to American baseball along with microbrews and the requisite huge flatscreen TV.

The shopping area has been expanded by about 1,000 square feet, with elegant wares including Versace jewelry, Omar Torres, and XOXO. Merabella, the upscale jewelry store introduced on the *Amsterdam* and added to the *Westerdam,* is showcased here, and Fine Watches does a brisk business in Fendi, Tissot, Tag Heuer, and other designer timepieces.

On *Eurodam* HAL has positioned its Explorations Café within the Crow's Nest, bringing much more activity to this beautiful vantage point on top of the ship. The views from the Internet stations are gorgeous enough to distract anyone, and the usual specialty coffees and pastries have been augmented with treats like tiny cupcakes. At night a live band and soloists take over, and the Internet cafe portion is screened off with a separate entrance.

Those who want to put their cameras or computers to better use will be very pleased with the beautifully designed HAL Digital Workshop powered by Microsoft Windows. Free workshops led by Microsoft techies somehow simultaneously work for complete beginners and still deliver an impressive amount of training in blogging, digital imagery, making movies, editing, and creating scrapbooks.

Club HAL has an expanded presence on *Eurodam,* very colorful and Euro-minimal for the most part, with a computer room, games arcade, craft room, small stage, and the teens-only Loft. The age groups are a little larger than on most family-oriented ships, with three ranges (3–7, 8–12, and 13–17). Families on board also had a tendency to take over the poolside cabanas, where they could lounge, eat, and nap in semiprivacy, and the beautiful Culinary Arts Center offers programs for children as well as adults.

DINING OPTIONS There are eight different dining venues on *Eurodam* to offer HAL's choice of As You Wish or traditional dining, including three new dining ones: the Pan-Asian Tamarind, the family Italian Canaletto (dinner only), and Slice, a 24-hour pizzeria.

The star is unquestionably Tamarind and its adjacent companion, the very charming and intimate Silk Den, pale purple and yellow and offering signature saketinis. Tamarind diners devoured chef Rudi Sodamin's wasabi-soy-crusted beef tenderloin, sea bass with hoisin-lime glaze, and roasted Peking duck, enjoying the exquisite presentation and the ladder of orchids at the door. The $15 fee for evening meals wouldn't even cover the tips for cuisine at this level in a major city, and dim sum is offered at lunchtime without charge.

Canaletto takes over a portion of the Lido at night, turning into a 72-seat family-style Italian restaurant without fee, but popular enough so that reservations are a very good idea. The extensive menu rotates with three entrees each evening, bringing people back repeatedly, and serves tableside antipasto and signature dishes such as chicken marsala scaloppini and penne alla vodka.

The new 24-hour pizzeria Slice does offer slices, but also 12-inch hand-tossed pizzas with whole wheat or regular crust and toppings from eggplant and pesto to pineapple and mussels.

Eurodam's 1,114-seat Rembrandt dining room provides choices from steak and lobster to unusually imaginative vegetarian dishes in quietly rich surroundings with a wave effect on the ceiling, and the new Pinnacle Grill fare introduces dishes such as Colorado lamb chops and lobster mac-and-cheese, along with a new martini menu; the fee is $30 for dinner, $15 at lunch.

There are plenty of options for lunch and dinner: the Terrace Grill is a French twist on its former incarnation, and at dinnertime the Lido offers table service; you can select dishes from the main dining room menu or the Lido's own offerings. At breakfast and lunch you do feel the increased number of passengers on board, with long lines and difficulty finding tables at hours of peak use.

Among the various bars and lounges are new additions including the Explorer's Lounge bar and the new Pinnacle Bar, a hard-edge modern wine bar next to the Pinnacle Grill.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The aptly named Retreat sunning and relaxation section a deck above the activity of the main pool area is a new move for HAL, and it's been very well received. The biggest attraction is the selection of 14 cabanas—tented, airy private worlds, very well furnished; 8 cabanas are also positioned by the Lido pool. Both sets tend to be very popular, so it's important to arrange rental as quickly as possible, whether for a day or for the cruise. The cabanas come with loaded iPods, Evian water, chilled grapes, fruit trays, champagne, and chocolate. Rental for cabanas in the Retreat is $45 on port days and $75 on sea days; Lido cabanas are $30 on port day and $50 on sea days. Retreat cabana guests are offered light breakfast and lunches, while Lido cabana guests can request selections from the Terrace Grill or Lido restaurants. The only drawback is space: The cabanas have significantly reduced the amount of sunning space in the Lido area, which could prove to be a problem in the Caribbean.

Eurodam's midships Lido pool is covered with a retractable Magrodome and has an eight-foot waterfall feature etched with the word "water" in 100 languages. Three poolside hot tubs are kept at different temperature levels for different tastes, and the surrounding lounges and sheltered tables and chairs are very comfortable. The smaller Sea View pool aft of the Lido has its own bar and the Slice pizzeria is adjacent.

The ship's Greenhouse Spa offers a full menu of spa treatments and salon services for men, women, and teens, with a particularly attractive central hydrotherapy pool and thermal suite and an aromatherapy steam room. The fitness center is well equipped with treadmills, bicycles, elliptical machines, and a great ocean view. Resistance equipment, free weights, and aerobics classes round out the offerings, and for those who prefer to do their walking or jogging outside, one circuit of the Promenade Deck is a third of a mile. Also outdoors on Deck 12 is the net-enclosed Sports Court, set up for basketball, volleyball, and the like.

The Vista Class: Zuiderdam • Oosterdam • Westerdam • Noordam

Zuiderdam *(photo: Holland America Line)*

The Verdict

Holland America's first foray into megasize ships married traditional HAL style with a partying Caribbean feel—a weird fit that was toned back somewhat in each successive sister ship.

Specifications

Size (in tons)	85,000	*Oosterdam*	2003
Passengers (double occ.)	1,848	*Westerdam*	2004
Passenger/Space Ratio	46	*Noordam*	2006
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	924/623	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Crew	800	*Zuiderdam*	2005
Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.3 to 1	*Oosterdam*	2006
Year Launched		*Westerdam*	2006
Zuiderdam	2002	*Noordam*	N/A

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4.5	Dining Options	4
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4.5
Public Comfort/Space	4	Children's Facilities	3
Decor	3.5	Enjoyment Factor	4

Built on a similar design as Carnival's Spirit-class ships, *Zuiderdam* (named for the southern point of the Dutch compass, and with a first syllable that rhymes with "eye"), *Oosterdam* (eastern, and with a first syllable like the letter O), *Westerdam,* and *Noordam* (northern compass point) were technically Holland America's first megaships, though they're downright cozy compared to the behemoths other lines are churning out these days.

Designed to help HAL shed its image as your grandmother's cruise line and attract baby boomers, the first of these vessels—2002's *Zuiderdam*—came off totally unnatural, mixing ultrabright Carnival-esque colors, stark W Hotel modernism, and the traditional style for which HAL was previously known. That mistake was toned down some for sister ship *Oosterdam,* and by the time *Westerdam* came on the scene in 2004, the new look had been refined. The fourth and final sister, *Noordam* (which replaced the previous *Noordam,* which left the fleet in November 2004), seems to do it just right, mixing classic wine reds, dark blues, and earth tones with just a hint of zany, such as the silver-framed benches on the elevator landings and in the Pinnacle Grill and Pinnacle Bar.

In the spirit of learning from their mistakes, HAL has gone back and tweaked parts of the *Zuiderdam,* replacing some of the loudest carpeting with darker shades, for

example, and removing some jarring "art" pieces like the giant-red-lips bench that graced one corridor. All four sisters are extraordinarily spacious, with large standard cabins, truly glamorous two-level dining rooms, and distinctive specialty restaurants.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$96	185	yes	yes	no	yes
Outside	$108	194–200	yes	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$210	298–1,000	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS Cabins in all categories are comfortable and, as aboard every HAL ship, are among the industry's largest, with a simple decor of light woods, clean lines, and subtly floral bedding. Overall, more than two-thirds of them have verandas, with the deluxe Verandah Suites and staterooms in the stern notable for their deep balconies, nearly twice the size of those to port and starboard. You get a romantic view of the ship's wake, too, but because the decks are tiered back here, residents of the cabins above you can see right down.

Standard outside and veranda cabins all have a small sitting area and a tub in the bathroom—a relatively rare thing in standard cabins these days. Closet space in all categories is more than adequate for 7-night cruises, with nicely designed fold-down shelves and tie rack. Each has a flatscreen TV and DVD player, makeup mirror, real hair dryer, massage shower head, bathrobes, and extrathick supercomfortable bedding. Dataports allow passengers to access e-mail and the Internet from every cabin via their own laptops.

Suites run from the comfortably spacious Superior Verandah Suites (with wide verandas, large sofa bed, walk-in closet, separate shower and bathroom, and extra windows) to the Penthouse Verandah Suites—extremely large multiroom apartments with a flowing layout, pantry, palatial bathrooms with oversize whirlpool baths, and ridiculously large private verandas with a second, outdoor whirlpool. Their decor is reminiscent of 1930s moderne style. Guests in every suite category have use of a concierge lounge whose staff will take care of shore-excursion reservations and any matters about which you'd normally have to wait in line at the front desk. The lounge is stocked with reading material, coffee, and juice, and a continental breakfast is served daily.

Twenty-eight cabins are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS Public rooms on the Vista-class ships run the gamut from the traditional to the modern, and from the lovely to the weird (again, we're talking mostly the *Zuiderdam* and *Oosterdam,* which still have some of their original ill-conceived public rooms). The more traditional spaces, done mostly in blues, teals, burgundys, and deep metallics, include the signature Explorer's Lounge, a venue for quiet musical performances and high tea. The top-of-the-ship Crow's Nest lounge, an observation lounge during the day and nightclub/disco at night, offers wide-open views, comfortable leather recliners toward the bow (a perfect reading perch during days at sea), and even a few rococo thrones on the starboard side, good for "wish you were here" cruise photos. The rear port corner of the Crow's Nest is the most truly elegant lounge area aboard, with high-style, striking, and comfortable furniture; it's also one of the ships' Wi-Fi hot zones.

Lower Promenade Deck is the hub of indoor activity on these ships. In the bow, the three-deck Vista Lounge is the venue for large-scale production shows, while the

Queen's Lounge/Culinary Arts Center at midships hosts chef demos by day and comedians and other cabaret-style acts in the evening. Between the two there's a piano bar and a casino, the latter really flashy on all but the *Noordam.* You'll also find HAL's first-ever dedicated discos, but they're uninspired at best (and, on *Zuiderdam,* just butt-ugly). Our favorite room, the Sports Bar, is as far from the standard rah-rah sports-hero-and-pennants sports bar as you can imagine, with comfortable free-form leather seating and table lamps. *Très* chic. Only the multiple TVs give away the place's true identity.

One deck up, the traditional Ocean Bar—with bay windows to port and starboard—wraps around the understated three-deck atrium, with its Waterford crystal chandelier centerpiece. Moving forward, you pass through the drab shopping arcade, whose displays spill right into the central corridor courtesy of retractable walls, forcing you to browse as you walk from stem to stern. A lot of lines are doing this and it's a pretty crass sales pitch; it gets a big thumbs-down from us. Once you get through, you come to Explorations Café, the ships' hub, and a combination specialty coffee shop, Internet center, and library, with HAL's signature inlaid marble tables.

Other public rooms include the Main Deck's Atrium Bar, a very comfortable small-scale nook vaguely reminiscent of a 1930s nightclub; the wicker-furnitured outdoor Lido Bar on the Lido Deck (which unfortunately lacks the charm of similar spaces on the line's older ships); and the KidZone and WaveRunner children/teen centers, which are a bit bare, though roomy and sunny. Art in the public areas of the ships includes maritime artwork by Stephen Card, replica 18th-century Dutch engravings, ship models, and on the *Zuiderdam,* some nice humorous paintings by Hans Leijerzapf, commedia dell'arte statues, and jazz sketches and paintings by Wil van der Laar. *Oosterdam*'s Java Corner has several sketches of landmark Frank Lloyd Wright designs.

Oceanview elevators at port and starboard midships are a little boxy, closing off some of the intended inspiring views. Much better views are to be had from outdoor areas forward on Decks 5, 6, and 7, and from an area just forward of the gym, above the bridge. You can even check a ship's compass here.

DINING OPTIONS The main Vista Dining Room is a two-deck affair, decorated traditionally but with nice touches of modernism—for instance, in *Zuiderdam*'s black, high-backed wooden chairs—which are very sharp. On *Noordam,* the elegant space is a throwback with wine-red fabrics, darkish woods, and a cozy living-room-like feeling. It's a lovely dining room. The ship's alternative Pacific Northwest restaurant, the 130-seat Pinnacle Grill, wraps partially around the three-deck atrium—ask for a table by the windows or in the aft corner for the coziest experience. The design is appealing, with marble floors, bright white linens, gorgeous Bulgari place settings, and ornate, organically sculpted chairs by Gilbert Libirge, who also created the ships' beautiful, batik-patterned elevator doors.

Diners wanting something more casual can opt for the well-laid-out and attractive Lido buffet restaurant; the outdoor Grill for burgers, dogs, and the like; or, on all but the *Noordam,* the Windstar Café, serving specialty coffees (for a price), snacks, and light meals in a tall-ship atmosphere.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES Gyms are well equipped with a full complement of cardio equipment and weight machines arranged in tiers around the cardio floor; the space is attached to another room where you'll find chaise longues and a large dipping pool. There's also a basketball/volleyball court on the Sports Deck. The Greenhouse Spa is fully 50% larger than any other in the HAL fleet, and besides

offering the usual massage, mud, and exotic treatments, it has a couple of HAL firsts: a thermal suite (a series of saunas and other heat-therapy rooms) and a hydrotherapy pool, which uses heated seawater and high-pressure jets to alleviate muscle tension. Oddly, there's no compelling design motif like you'd find in other signature spas. Around the pool, extraheavy wooden lounge chairs are thick padded and nap-worthy. The pool area doesn't quite work on *Zuiderdam,* where the colors are jarring and the materials cheap looking, but as in many other areas, *Oosterdam*'s, *Westerdam*'s, and *Noordam*'s are a vast improvement, very pleasant all around.

Outdoors, the wraparound Promenade Deck is lined with classy wooden deck chairs—a nice touch of classic ocean-liner style—and is popular with walkers and joggers. The main Pool Deck is the hub of outdoor activity on sea days, with hot tubs, music, and pool games, and can be covered with a sliding roof in inclement weather. The hallmarks of the pool area on both ships are giant bronze animal statues—from a polar bear, to a penguin and dolphin. Another pool, in the stern on Lido Deck, is a lovely spot for sunbathing and open views of the sea.

Rotterdam • Amsterdam

The Verdict

Modern throwbacks to the glory days of transatlantic travel without the stuffiness or class separation, these attractive, gloriously midsize sisters offer great features, from classic art to rich mahogany woodwork and elegant yet understated public rooms.

Amsterdam *(photo: Holland America Line)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)		Crew	
Rotterdam	56,652	*Rotterdam*	593
Amsterdam	61,000	*Amsterdam*	647
Passengers (double occ.)		Passenger/Crew Ratio	
Rotterdam	1,316	*Rotterdam*	2.2 to 1
Amsterdam	1,380	*Amsterdam*	2.1 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio		Year Launched	
Rotterdam	43	*Rotterdam*	1997
Amsterdam	44.2	*Amsterdam*	2000
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins		Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Rotterdam	658/161	*Rotterdam*	2005
Amsterdam	690/172	*Amsterdam*	2005

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5) ★★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4.5	Dining Options	4
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4.5
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	3
Decor	5	Enjoyment Factor	4.5

With 3 years separating them, near-twins *Rotterdam* and *Amsterdam* combine classic elegance with contemporary amenities and provide a very comfortable cruise, especially on itineraries of 10 nights and longer. Carrying just over 1,300 passengers at double occupancy, they're a breath of fresh air in the sea of supermegaships that ply the oceans these days. *Rotterdam* is the sixth HAL ship to bear that name, following the legendary *Rotterdam V,* which was sold in 1997.

At press time, *Rotterdam* was scheduled to undergo a December 2009 renovation that would add Lanai Staterooms that open directly onto the Promenade Deck, plus several new staterooms aft. This will increase the vessel's capacity to 1,404. See description of the Lanai Staterooms in the *Veendam* review, p. 189.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$104	182	no	yes	yes	yes
Outside	$125	197	no	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$239	225–937	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS Unlike the beige color schemes of the older Statendam-class ships, the decor here is livelier, with corals, mangoes, blues, and whites brightening things up. The standard cabins are among the most spacious at sea and offer enough hanging and drawer space for 10-night-plus cruises. Bathrooms are generous as well, with bathtubs in all but the standard inside cabins (and, on *Amsterdam,* in a handful of outsides as well). Each cabin has a sitting area, a desk, a safe, two lower beds convertible to a queen, and great reading lights above each bed, in addition to the line's recently added amenities: flat-panel plasma TVs and DVD players, terry-cloth bathrobes, massage shower heads, lighted magnifying makeup mirrors, and salon-quality hair dryers. Beds now have plush, amazingly comfy triple-sheeted mattresses and 100% Egyptian cotton bed linens.

Verandah Suites are 225 square feet and have a 59-square-foot private veranda; Deluxe Verandah Suites measure 374 square feet and have a 189-square-foot veranda and a dressing room. Both have sitting areas, whirlpool tubs, and stocked minibars, and are kept stocked with fresh fruit. Penthouse Suites measure 937 square feet and have a 189-square-foot veranda, living room, dining room, guest bathroom, and an oversize whirlpool tub. All suite guests have use of a concierge lounge whose staff will take care of shore-excursion reservations and any matters about which you'd normally have to wait in line at the front desk. The lounge is stocked with reading material, and a continental breakfast is served daily.

Twenty-one cabins are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS Both ships have great, easy-to-navigate layouts that allow passengers to move easily among public rooms. Most of the inside public areas are concentrated on two decks; ditto for the pools, sunning areas, spa, sports facilities, and buffet restaurant, which are all on the Lido and Sports decks.

Overall, the ships give you the feeling of an elegant old hotel, with dark red and blue upholstery and leathers, damask fabrics, mahogany tones, and gold accents. Artwork is everywhere, from the stairwells to the walkways on the Promenade and Upper Promenade decks. Aboard *Amsterdam,* the theme is Dutch and nautical; aboard *Rotterdam,* it's Continental and Asian. In *Amsterdam*'s atrium, a clock tower combines an

astrolabe, a world clock, a planetary clock, and an astrological clock. You can't miss it; it's been wedged into the space with barely an inch to spare. *Rotterdam*'s passengers are greeted in the atrium by a large reproduction Flemish clock.

The Explorations Café is a main hub on the ships and the place to check your e-mail or surf the Web while enjoying a cappuccino.

The Ocean Bar serves complimentary hot hors d'oeuvres before dinner nightly, and passengers pack into the bar to listen and dance to a lively trio. More elegant is the Explorer's Lounge, whose string ensemble performs a classical repertoire. Nearby is the open-sided piano bar, featuring a red lacquered baby grand piano on the *Amsterdam.*

The Crow's Nest observation lounge/disco gets fairly little use during the day unless there's a special event being held (such as line-dance classes), but it's a popular spot for pre-dinner cocktails and after-dinner dancing. Near the room's entrance on *Amsterdam* you'll see the *Four Seasons* sculptures originally created for the old *Nieuw Amsterdam* in 1938, and purchased back by the line from a private collector. On *Rotterdam,* a highlight of the Crow's Nest is the life-size terra-cotta human and horse figures, copies of ancient statues discovered in Xian, China.

The *Amsterdam*'s main showroom, perhaps the brightest of the rooms, is done in red and gold and is more a nightclub than a theater. Sit on the banquettes for the best sightlines, as alternating rows of individual chairs sit lower and don't permit most passengers to see over the heads of those in front of them. The balcony offers decent sightlines.

Other public rooms include a large casino, library, card room, and the Wajang Theatre for movie viewing and also the spot where HAL's Culinary Arts Center demonstration kitchen resides.

DINING OPTIONS Aboard both ships, the attractive two-level formal dining rooms have floor-to-ceiling windows and an elegant, nostalgic feel, and never seem crowded. The Pinnacle Grill seats fewer than 100 diners and offers romantic, intimate Pacific Northwest cuisine in an elegant setting. The only downside here: no windows. And be careful of those funky chairs; they tip forward if you lean too far toward your soup. Aboard *Amsterdam,* make a point of looking at the paintings, all of which have a joke hidden somewhere on the canvas—look for the RCA "his master's voice" dog on the Italian rooftop, and for Marilyn Monroe by the lily pond.

As in the rest of the fleet, a casual buffet-style breakfast, lunch, and dinner are offered in the Lido restaurant, a bright, cheerful place done in corals and blues. It's a well-laid-out space, with separate salad, drink, deli, dessert, and stir-fry stations. There's a taco bar poolside at lunchtime, and pizza is available in the afternoon.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES *Amsterdam* and *Rotterdam* have spacious, well-equipped gyms with a very large separate aerobics area, floor-to-ceiling ocean views, plenty of elbowroom, and a nice spa. There's a pair of swimming pools: one amidships on the Lido Deck, with a retractable glass roof and a pair of hot tubs, and another smaller, less trafficked and thus more relaxing one in the stern, letting on to open views of the ship's wake. Both ships have great wraparound Promenade decks lined with wooden deck chairs, a quiet and nostalgic spot for reading, snoozing, or—especially on *Amsterdam*'s Alaska itineraries and *Rotterdam*'s Europe cruises—scoping the scenery.

There's a combo volleyball and tennis court on the Sports Deck, and Ping-Pong tables are on the Lower Promenade in the sheltered bow.

Volendam • Zaandam

The Verdict

These handsome ships represent a successful marriage of HAL's usual elegance and gentility with a well-done dose of classy modern pizzazz. And they're an ideal size, too: big enough to offer lots of amenities and small enough to be much more intimate than today's jumbo megaships.

Volendam *(photo: Holland America Line)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	63,000	Year Launched	
Passengers (double occ.)	1,440	*Volendam*	1999
Passenger/Space Ratio	43.7	*Zaandam*	2000
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	720/197	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Crew	647	*Volendam*	2005
Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.2 to 1	*Zaandam*	2005

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

★★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4.5	Dining Options	4
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4.5
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	3
Decor	5	Enjoyment Factor	4.5

Introduced at the turn of this century, *Volendam* and *Zaandam* marked Holland America's first steps into a more diverse, mainstream future, offering an experience designed to attract the vital 40-something boomers while still keeping the line's core older passengers happy. The ships have alternative restaurants, Internet centers, and huge gyms that many lines attracting younger crowds can't match, but their overall vibe is more traditional than Carnival, Princess, and Royal Caribbean—and, for that matter, than the line's newer and much more glitzy Vista-class vessels. These are classy, classic ships, but with just a touch of funk to keep things from seeming too old-fashioned—note the autographed Bill Clinton saxophone and Iggy Pop guitar in *Zaandam*'s elegant Sea View Lounge.

These ships, along with the rest of the HAL fleet, were upgraded over the past few years with the line's Signature of Excellence enhancements, including the Explorations Café Internet center, beefed-up kids' facilities, a Culinary Arts Center demonstration kitchen, and upgraded cabin amenities.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$86	186	no	yes	yes	yes
Outside	$93	196	no	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$214	284–1,126	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS In a word: roomy. These standard cabins are among the largest in the industry, and with a much more modern, daring look than on the line's older ships. Fabrics are done in salmon red, burgundy, gold, and bronze, and the walls in a striped pale-gold fabric, hung with gilt-framed prints. Bathrooms are roomy and well designed, with adequate storage shelves and counter space. All outside cabins have shower/tub combos (short tubs, but tubs nonetheless), while inside cabins have only showers. Cabin drawer space is plentiful, and closets are roomy, with great shelves that fold down if you want to adjust the configuration of space. There's a storage drawer under each bed.

All cabins have sitting areas, plus Holland America's Signature of Excellence enhancements, from flat-panel TVs and DVD players, to terry-cloth bathrobes, massage shower heads, lighted magnifying makeup mirrors, and salon-quality hair dryers. Beds are supercomfy with plush triple-sheeted mattresses and 100% Egyptian cotton bed linens.

On the Verandah and Navigation decks, 197 suites and minisuites have balconies, including the single gorgeous Penthouse Suite, which measures 1,126 square feet, including veranda, and is adorned with one-of-a-kind pieces such as 19th-century Portuguese porcelain vases and Louis XVI marble table lamps.

Twenty-one cabins are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS *Volendam*'s public areas are floral themed; *Zaandam*'s sport musical motifs. Aboard *Volendam,* each aft staircase landing has a still-life painting of flowers, and a spot outside the library has a collection of elaborate delft tulip vases (ironically, with fake silk tulips). You could even call the gorgeous graduated colors in the show lounge seating florally themed, with colors from magenta to marigold creating a virtual garden in bloom. *Zaandam*'s theme is exemplified by one of the more bizarre and inspired atrium decorations we know of—a huge, mostly ornamental baroque pipe organ decorated with figures of musicians and dancers—as well as by numerous musical instruments scattered around the ship in display cases, from a classic Ornette Coleman–style plastic Grafton sax in the Sea View Lounge to the elaborate Mozart harpsichord display (with busts and a candelabra) outside the card room. The display of electric guitars in the atrium stair tower, signed by Queen, Eric Clapton, and the Rolling Stones, says something about HAL's drive to attract younger passengers—even if "younger" means 50-somethings.

In general, as aboard almost the entire HAL fleet, public areas are very easy to navigate. Corridors are broad, and there's little chance of getting lost or disoriented. Surfaces and fabrics overall are an attractive medley of subtle textures and materials, from tapestry walls and ceilings to velveteen chairs, marble tabletops, and smoky glass. *Volendam* even has a red-lacquer piano and suede walls woven to resemble rattan. *Zaandam*'s pianos are all funky: The one in the piano bar is painted to look as though it's made of scrap lumber and rusty nails; the one in the Lido restaurant is downright psychedelic.

The main hub of the ship for many is the Explorations Café, a combination Internet center and coffee bar, with plenty of comfy seating and magazines to read.

The warm and almost glowingly cozy Explorer's Lounge is another favorite area, along with the nearby Sea View Lounge and the adjacent piano bar, with its round, pill-like leather bar stools and plush sofas. On busy nights, the Ocean Bar can get crowded by the bar, but there's usually plenty of space across the room or near the dance floor, where a live jazz band plays danceable music before and after dinner.

The ever-popular Crow's Nest nightclub has been redesigned and now has features such as banquettes in bright, modern colors and translucent white floor-to-ceiling curtains that function both as decor and movable enclosures for private events. Cocktail mixology classes and other events are offered here during the day; after dinner, it becomes the ships' disco and nightclub. The Culinary Arts Center demo kitchen shares space with the Wajang Theatre, and is the venue for at least two cooking demonstrations per cruise that are hosted by well-regarded chefs. As on other HAL vessels, the ships' main showrooms are two-story affairs with movable clusters of single seats and banquettes on the ground level in front of the stage so that passengers can get comfortable.

Both vessels have impressive art and antiques sprinkled throughout their public areas. The booty on *Volendam* includes an authentic Renaissance fountain outside the casino (the ship's most pricey piece), an inlaid marble table in the library (a HAL signature), and a small earthenware mask dating from 1200 B.C. that's kept in a display case near the Explorer's Lounge. On *Zaandam,* an area outside the library features reproductions of Egyptian jewelry and a huge repro Egyptian statue fragment.

DINING OPTIONS The two-story main dining rooms are truly glamorous, framed with floor-to-ceiling windows and punctuated by dramatic staircases. A classical trio serenades guests from a perch on the top level. Just outside the second level of the dining room is a place women won't want to miss: a wonderful powder room with ocean views and lots of elbowroom for primping, with vanity tables and stools in one room, and the toilets and sinks adjacent. Both ships also feature HAL's fleetwide Pacific Northwest specialty restaurant, the intimate Pinnacle Grill (see "Dining," on p. 170).

The Lido buffet restaurants are attractive and efficiently constructed, with separate stations for salads, desserts, and beverages, cutting down on the chance of monstrously long lines. A sandwich station serves its creations on delicious fresh-baked breads.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The gyms on these ships are attractive and roomy, with floor-to-ceiling windows surrounding dozens of state-of-the-art machines. The ships' spas were recently upgraded and you won't be disappointed with the offerings.

Three pools are on the Lido Deck: a small and quiet aft pool (behind the Lido buffet restaurant) and the main pool and wading pool, located under a retractable glass roof in a sprawling area that includes the pleasant, cafelike Dolphin Bar, with rattan chairs and shade umbrellas. There are more isolated areas for sunbathing above the aft pool on a patch of the Sports Deck and in little slivers of open space aft on most of the cabin decks. The Sports Deck also has a pair of practice tennis courts, as well as shuffleboard. Joggers can use the uninterrupted Lower Promenade Deck to get their workout.

The Statendam Class: Statendam • Maasdam • Ryndam • Veendam

Veendam *(photo: Holland America Line)*

The Verdict

These ships are well made and designed, and for some, a perfect midsize in this age of gigantic circuslike megas. Public areas are functional and appealing, with just a dash of glitz and plenty of classic European and Indonesian art.

Specifications

Size (in tons)	55,451	*Maasdam*	1993
Passengers (double occ.)	1,266*	*Ryndam*	1994
Passenger/Space Ratio	43.8	*Veendam*	1996
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	633/149*	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Crew	602	*Statendam*	2005
Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.1 to 1	*Maasdam*	2006
Year Launched		*Ryndam*	2004
Statendam	1993	*Veendam*	2009

* Veendam's *passenger count is now 1,350, and her total cabin count is 675.*

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

★★★★

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	4
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	3
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	4.5

Refreshingly intimate, agile, and handsome looking, these four vessels are, like all the HAL ships, extremely well laid out and easy to navigate. Holland America's 55,451-ton Statendam-class ships are cozy at one-third the size of the today's biggest megas and, relatively speaking, are classics at ages running from 13 to 16. Decor is a subdued scheme of earthy tones and traditional art works. Touches of marble, teak, polished brass, and multimillion-dollar collections of art and maritime artifacts lend a classic ambience, and many decorative themes emphasize the Netherlands' seafaring traditions. The onboard mood is low key (though things get dressy at night), the cabins are large and comfortable, and there are dozens of comfortable nooks all over the ships in which you can curl up and relax. And, there's hardly anything more appealing about a ship than a sleek hull with a dark paint job, tiered aft decks, and a long sweeping foredeck—these are covered in teak, offering passengers a great place to view the passing scenery.

In summer 2009, portions of *Veendam* were rebuilt to create 38 Lanai Staterooms with large sliding glass doors that afford direct access to the Lower Promenade's teak walking deck. *Maasdam, Statendam,* and *Ryndam* will receive similar stateroom upgrades during dry docks in 2010 and 2011.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$71	186	no	yes	yes	yes
Outside	$78	197	no	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$278	284–1,126	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS Cabins are roomy, unfussy, and comfortable, with light-grained furniture and fabrics in safe shades of blue, beige, and burgundy. Show curtains separate the sleeping area from the sitting area. White-gloved stewards add a hospitable touch. All cabins have twin beds that can be converted to a queen and, in some cases, a king, all with plush triple-sheeted mattresses and 100% Egyptian cotton bed linens—the most comfortable cruise ship beds Heidi has ever slept on. About 200 cabins can accommodate a third and fourth passenger on a foldaway sofa bed and/or an upper berth. Closets and storage space are larger than the norm, and bathrooms are well designed and well lit, with bathtubs in all but the lowest category. All cabins have personal safes and music channels, plus flat-panel TVs and DVD players (great if you have kids—bring those cartoons from home!), terry-cloth bathrobes, massage shower heads, lighted magnifying makeup mirrors, and salon-quality hair dryers.

Outside cabins have picture windows and views of the sea, though those on the Lower Promenade Deck have pedestrian walkways (and, occasionally, pedestrians) between you and the ocean. *Veendam* now has 38 Lanai Staterooms that open directly onto this deck, with mirrored sliding glass doors and reserved deck chairs just outside—nicely old-fashioned. We like.

Minisuites are larger than those aboard some of the most expensive lines, such as SeaDream. Full suites are 563 square feet, and the Penthouse Suite sprawls across a full 1,126 square feet. Suite passengers have the choice of three pillow types.

Six cabins are outfitted for passengers with disabilities, and public areas are also wheelchair-friendly, with spacious corridors, wide elevators, and wheelchair-accessible public toilets.

PUBLIC AREAS For the most part, public areas are subdued, consciously tasteful, and soothing. The Sky Deck offers an almost 360-degree panorama where the only drawback is the roaring wind. One deck below, almost equivalent views are available from the ever-popular Crow's Nest nightclub, which offers a subtly glowing bar; banquettes in bright, modern colors; and translucent white floor-to-ceiling curtains that function as both decor and movable enclosures for private events. Cocktail mixology classes and other events are offered here during the day; after dinner, it becomes the ships' disco and nightclub where theme parties and dancing take place. The ships' small, three-story atria are pleasant enough and refreshingly unglitzy, housing the passenger-services and shore-excursions desks as well as officers' offices.

The ships' two-story showrooms are modern and stylish, but not overdone. On the *Statendam,* for instance, muted gold columns blend elegantly with lovely tile mosaic work in shades of blue and green. Unlike most ships, which have rows of theaterlike seats or couches, the lower levels are configured with cozy groupings of cushy banquettes and chairs that can be moved. The balcony, however, has bench seating, with low backs that make it impossible to lean back without slouching.

The trendiest spot is the Explorations Café, a well-stocked library and Internet center with a coffee bar and ocean views. A buzzing hub of activity, there are 12 computer stations and several plug points for those going wireless with laptops. Five leather chaise longues partnered with CD players and headphone stations face the sea through floor-to-ceiling windows, while other clusters of couches and chairs are set among the generous shelves of periodicals and books, which include everything from travel to fiction, science, history, gardening, and reference titles. A magazine rack holds current issues of popular magazines and newspapers, when the ship can get them. If you're a crossword buff, you can tackle the *Times*' puzzles embedded under glass in the room's cafe tables (wax pencils are provided).

There's a dark and cozy piano bar, where requests are taken, or head to the elegant Explorer's Lounge, a popular venue for high tea in the afternoon and for light classical and parlor music after dinner. A live band plays for dancers before dinner in the very popular Ocean Bar, and the nice-size casinos are spacious though not as pleasingly designed as aboard the line's newer ships. A small movie theater shows films a few times a day, and this space also houses the Culinary Arts Center demonstration kitchen—the movie screen descends in front of the kitchen during showtimes.

For children, the youngest play in a bright but smallish room decorated like a giant paint box, and preteens have a karaoke machine and video games. Lucky teens, however, get the Oasis, a top-deck sun deck with a wading pool with waterfall, teak deck chairs, hammocks, colorful Astroturf, and lamps designed as metal palm trees, all enclosed by a bamboo fence. This would be a great space for group events on sailings with few kids aboard.

DINING OPTIONS These ships have elegant, two-story main dining rooms at the stern, with dual staircases swooping down to the lower level for grand entrances and a music balcony at the top where a duo or trio serenades diners. Ceilings are glamorous with their lotus-flower glass fixtures, and two smaller attached dining rooms are available for groups. HAL's specialty restaurant, the Pinnacle Grill (see "Dining," p. 170), has a classy, more modern feel to it.

The casual indoor/outdoor buffet restaurant is well laid out, with separate stations for salads, desserts, and drinks, which helps keep lines to a minimum. The restaurant serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner daily, and its pizza and ice-cream stations are open until just before dinner. An outdoor grill on the Lido Deck serves burgers and other sandwich items throughout the afternoon, and a nearby station allows you to make your own tacos or nachos at lunch.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES Each ship has a sprawling expanse of teak-covered aft deck surrounding a swimming pool. One deck above and centrally located is a second swimming pool, plus a wading pool, hot tubs, and a spacious deck—all under a sliding glass roof to allow use in Alaska, or in inclement weather elsewhere. Imaginative, colorful tile designs and a dolphin sculpture add spice, and the attractive Dolphin Bar, with umbrellas and wicker chairs, is the perfect spot for a drink and snack in the late afternoon after a shore excursion.

The Sports Deck on each ship has combo basketball/tennis/volleyball courts, and the lovely Lower Promenade Deck offers an unobstructed circuit of the ship for walking, jogging, or just lounging in the snazzy, traditional-looking wooden deck chairs. The ships' windowed Ocean Spa gyms offer a couple dozen exercise machines, a large aerobics area, steam rooms, and saunas. The redesigned Greenhouse Spas are an

improvement, each including thermal suites with a hydrotherapy whirlpool and heated tile loungers.

The Forward Observation Deck, a huge expanse of open teak deck, is accessible only via two stairways hidden away in the forward (covered) portion of the Promenade Deck, and so gets little use. But don't miss going there. There's no deck furniture here, but standing in the very bow as the ship plows through the ocean is a wonderful, wonderful experience.

8 MSC Cruises

6750 N. Andrews Ave., Fort Lauderdale, FL 33309. ✆ **800/666-9333.** www.msccruises.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL Italian line MSC is an evolutionary success story, transforming itself from a near-budget line sailing secondhand ships into a major player whose megaship fleet is the youngest in the cruise biz, offering a European-style cruise experience and good prices to boot. **Sails to:** Caribbean, New England/Canada (plus Europe, South America).

THE EXPERIENCE Based in Italy, where it was born as an adjunct of Mediterranean Shipping Company (the world's second-largest container-shipping operation), MSC's all about "Italian style": Italian menus, lots of Italians (and other Europeans) on board, European-style entertainment, and a laid-back, nearly laissez-faire attitude. Its large, modern ships leaven their contemporary cruise experience with elements of what cruising was like in the distant and not-so-distant past, with Italian flair and an international feel. The line attempts to cater to a mostly American audience when it operates in the North American market, and primarily to Europeans when it's in Europe.

Pros

- **Fun activities:** As at Costa, the European entertainment staff knows how to get people in the mood for fun.
- **Italian cuisine:** MSC's distinctive regional dishes and pastas may be among the best at sea, and the evening pizza is superb. Ditto for the Italian wine list: excellent and quite reasonable.
- **Unusual entertainment touches:** While the line's internationalized production shows can lapse into the usual song and dance, novelties such as jugglers, magicians, classical pianists, and opera singers add a nice touch.
- **Low prices:** Despite some negatives, this is still a line on which you can get good bang for your buck—especially true for families because kids up to 17 traveling in third and fourth berths sail essentially for free.

Cons

- **Inconsistent service:** Staff ranges from superb to surprisingly inattentive, the latter (most evident among the Italian staff) provoking one guest we met to comment, "You get the feeling that everyone has something more important to do than focus on you."
- **Not enough suites:** The two MSC ships in the U.S. have only 18 suites apiece.

MSC: ITALIAN LINE GOES INTERNATIONAL

MSC Cruises came into being in 1990 as the cruise wing of Mediterranean Shipping Company, one of the world's largest container-shipping operations. Originally

Compared with the other mainstream lines, here's how MSC rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor			✓		
Dining			✓		
Activities				✓	
Children's Program			✓		
Entertainment				✓	
Service		✓			
Worth the Money				✓	

concentrating on the European market, the line began making overtures to U.S. passengers after buying the Big Red Boat *Atlantic* from defunct Premier Cruises in 1998 and setting it off on 11-night Caribbean cruises. It was in 2003, however, that the line really began its hard sell to the English-speaking world, and today it's in the midst of a massive, sustained building program that's given it the youngest fleet at sea.

MSC concentrates on the European market, but dips its toes into the U.S. market each winter, sailing one or two ships on Caribbean routes out of South Florida. In fall 2010 they'll be upping that commitment, putting their newest ship, *MSC Magnifica,* on a series of New England/Canada cruises before sailing south for a winter in the Caribbean. Early 2010 Caribbean cruises will be aboard *Magnifica*'s slightly older fleetmate, *MSC Poesia.*

PASSENGER PROFILE

The typical age range is mid-40s and up, and although MSC's European itineraries tend to carry 85% European and 15% "other" (including North Americans), Caribbean itineraries are almost exactly reversed, with Americans dominating. Though the line doesn't currently carry as many kids in the Caribbean as it does in Europe, expect that to change as their "kids travel free" policy becomes better known in the U.S. To accommodate the cultural mix, announcements in the Caribbean are made in English and Italian (in that order) and sometimes Spanish, French, and German as well, though they attempt to keep to a "quiet ship" policy as much as possible.

DINING

In keeping with the line's intention of offering an international cruise experience, dining service is generally traditional, with a touch of European sensibility. Dining service, however, needs some work if it's going to compete with the American mainstream lines (see "Service," later).

The tug of war between Italian, American, and "other" traditions plays itself out in both positive and negative ways. On the positive (and surprising) side, MSC is the only line on which we've noticed a kosher category on the wine list—and the only line we've been on where poppy-seed bagels are a staple at the buffet. (On every other line, it's plain bagels, period.) On the annoying side, you may have to specially request coffee in the dining room after meals (only Americans do this, several Italian staff members told us), and you may be asked to order your dessert selection at the same time you make your full meal request (just tell them you haven't decided yet, if you haven't).

TRADITIONAL All of the line's modern midsize and megasize ships have two formal dining rooms apiece, serving open-seating breakfast and lunch. Dinner is served in two fixed seatings, with an emphasis on Italian cuisine. Six-course lunches include appetizers such as smoked salmon tartare, tomatoes stuffed with tuna mousse, and barbecued chicken wings; a soup of the day; a choice of salads; pasta selections such as ravioli, risotto with pears and Bel Paese cheese, and traditional spaghetti; and main courses that might include pan-roasted chicken breast in a Riesling wine sauce, sliced sirloin, Caribbean red snapper fillet, frittata with zucchini and Swiss cheese, or a plain old turkey sandwich. A selection of vegetables, cheeses, and desserts rounds out the offerings, along with made-to-order-burgers, a special **vegetarian menu,** and **healthy-choice options.**

Expect about the same for dinner, with appetizers such as lamb-and-mushroom quiche, avocado boat with seafood salad, and crispy fried spring rolls; a salad of the day; three soup selections, such as Trieste-style red bean soup, oxtail broth with sherry, and chilled orange and tomato cream soup; pasta selections such as risotto with artichokes and fresh mint leaves, and pappardelle pasta with white veal ragout; and main courses such as rock Cornish hen with mushrooms and crispy bacon, prime rib, grilled mahimahi fillet, and vegetable couscous with raisins and cashews. As at lunch, dinner offers a vegetarian menu, a healthy menu, and a selection of cheeses and desserts (including sugar-free desserts), plus a bread of the day. The daily **Italian regional specialties** tend to be the highlight of the menu, while other options can be inconsistent. On our last sailing, for example, the chimichurri minute steak came without the chimichurri sauce, and the crispy potato pancakes were delicious but not at all crispy. On the other hand, the Bolognese sauce was simply sublime.

An **always-available** list rounds out the offerings with steak, chicken, salmon fillets, Caesar salad (preprepared with a little romaine and a dollop of sauce on top), baked potato, and corn on the cob.

SPECIALTY The 2,550-passenger *Poesia* and *Magnifica* offer the stylish and delicious a la carte **Shanghai Chinese Restaurant,** and in the evenings the aft part of the buffet restaurant is sectioned off to create **4 Seasons,** serving a more refined version of Italian cuisine than in the main restaurants, with waiter service. There's a fixed per person charge here of $25. In addition, the **La Piazzetta Pizzeria** is opened in the evening for custom-made and absolutely sensational Neapolitan-style pizzas, along with a variety of Greek sandwiches and yummy desserts such as tiramisu. There's a small per-item charge but it's well, well, well worth it.

CASUAL A **buffet restaurant** serves all three meals, with dinner available from 6 to 8pm. To best avoid lines, guests should head to the back serving sections during breakfast and lunch.

SNACKS & EXTRAS In true Italian style, every bar on these ships is also a **coffee bar,** so guests can enjoy a well-made espresso or macchiato virtually anytime, anywhere. In the late evening hours, waiters bring snacks around to prepublicized locations, and once per cruise there's a not-to-be-missed midnight buffet—an increasingly rare happening in the cruise world.

Room service is available 24 hours a day from two different menus: a very limited menu of complimentary items and a fancier menu whose items come at extra cost.

MSC Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Magnifica	**Canada/New England:** 7-, 10-, 14- & 17-night, north- & southbound between New York and Québec City (Sept)
Poesia	**Caribbean:** 7-night eastern & western, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Jan–Apr). **Bermuda:** 7-night, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Apr).

ACTIVITIES

Activities on MSC tend toward cruise traditions, many of them with a European sense of fun. Some of the entertainment and activities may not be high-brow but they sure are fun for those who want to cut loose. Outside, expect **goofy pool games,** including water polo, relay races, dance lessons, and various team games, plus darts and **golf tournaments,** the latter on the minigolf course. Goofiness continues in the evenings, with the kind of **participatory games** for which Italian ships are known. Leave your self-consciousness at home. Flamenco and tango **dance lessons** might be held in one of the lounges. Other classes may include Italian language lessons and wine talks. Other activities include cards and bingo, gambling in the **casinos,** arts and crafts, and various meet-and-greet events such as singles and honeymooners cocktail parties.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

Poesia and *Magnifica* offer an indoor/outdoor kids' complex of four rooms plus wading pool on Deck 14, with activities broken down into three groups: Mini-Club (ages 3–8), Junior Club (9–13), and Teens (14–17). Activities include supervised circuses, disco, water yoga, shows, darts, volleyball and other tournaments, basketball, pajama parties, treasure hunts, Olympic pool games, quizzes, and more. The indoor/outdoor jungle-gym complex is very appealing, even to smaller adults before and after hours.

ENTERTAINMENT

Evening entertainment is centered around each ship's main theater. On our most recent cruise, the internationally themed productions shows were mostly well received. By design, they featured very little singing or talking in English, which distinguished them from the usual shows you find at sea. Some shows draw on European circus traditions, featuring jugglers, magicians, opera singers, and classical musicians. It's that European influence—also evident at **audience-participation shows,** the lively disco, and the **karaoke** sessions—that distinguishes MSC's entertainment from the American cruise lines. In the evening, there's live music in multiple lounges, ranging from a pianist to a combo, from a Mexican trio to a string quartet. Strangely for ships with so much live music, there's no live orchestra for the shows: Even background music for the classical pianists and opera singers is prerecorded.

SERVICE

Service is the number-one downside that MSC must address if it wants to reach a wider, more discerning audience. While the line touts its Italian officers and crew—a distinction that hearkens back to the Golden Age of ocean travel—it's those staff who tend to have the most lackadaisical attitude. Their surprising inattentiveness—especially at the front desk and banking office during our last cruise—is a major

deviation from the sophisticated ambience the line's advertising promises. It's the inconsistency that's most frustrating: When the service is good, it's great; when it isn't, it felt downright unfriendly.

Note that the line has, in fact, blurred its Italianness in recent years by recruiting service staff from Indonesia and other Asian nations. As on other lines, the Asian crew distinguishes itself with its attentiveness, though occasional language barriers can pop up from time to time.

Tipping is handled on an automatic basis, with $12 per person, per day added to your onboard account. The amount can be adjusted up or down by contacting the Reception Desk.

Laundry service is also available, though there are no self-serve laundries.

MSC Poesia • MSC Magnifica (preview)

The Verdict

One of MSC's first modern megaships, *Poesia* offers exceptional styling and a full range of activities and amenities, all in the line's typically international social setting.

MSC Poesia *(photo: MSC)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	89,600	Crew	987
Passengers (double occ.)	2,550	Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.6 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio	35.1	Year Launched	2007
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	1,275/827	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	N/A

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

★★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	4.5
Appearance & Upkeep	4.5	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4.5
Public Comfort/Space	4	Children's Facilities	4
Decor	4.5	Enjoyment Factor	4.5

Poesia and her sister ships *Musica* and *Orchestra* represent an evolutionary leap for MSC Cruises, which had previously concentrated on midsize vessels that get the job done but are a little short on pizzazz. These three, on the other hand, are truly modern megaships, offering high-style decor, multiple dining options, elaborate spas, wine-tasting bars, a multistory theater, and many appealing lounges and other features. *Poesia* will be sailing the Caribbean in the first months of 2010 before heading back to Europe. For late 2010 and 2011 MSC's U.S. sailings will be handled by the newer *MSC Magnifica,* a near–sister ship. Due to launch in March 2010, *Magnifica* will have balconies in a full 80% of her staterooms, a 15% increase from *Poesia, Orchestra,* and *Musica.* There will also be a retractable roof over the pool area—terrific for the potentially cooler and more inclement weather she'll face on her New England/Canada cruises.

All details in this review deal with *Poesia* only.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$79	152	yes	yes	no	yes
Outside	$100	166	yes	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$193	269*	yes	yes	yes	yes

** Including veranda*

CABINS The majority of accommodations on *Poesia* (some 65% of them) are outsides with balconies. Each is done up in a clean, pleasingly modern style, with lovely jewel-toned upholstery patterns (mostly subdued reds and blues) and light-wood accents, though they're sized a bit smaller than cabins on many competing megaships. Standard inside and outside cabins offer flatscreen TVs, minifridges, private safes, vanity/writing desks, a bathroom with shower, and Wi-Fi access. Outsides also have a small sitting area. Closet and storage space are adequate, and the bathrooms are efficiently designed, with adequate amounts of shelf space, though for toiletries you get only the basics. The 18 suites add a larger sitting area, a larger balcony, a king-size bed, a tub/shower combo, upgraded toiletries, bathrobes, and more closet space.

Seventeen cabins are wheelchair accessible—12 of them insides, 2 outsides with windows, and 3 outsides with balcony.

PUBLIC AREAS Public areas on *Poesia* are done in an eclectic style that mixes the clean lines of Princess, the modernism of Celebrity, the flashy ornateness of Costa and Carnival, and the fun of NCL, yet manages to pull them all together into a unified whole.

In the bow, the three-deck Teatro Carlo Felice is an explosion of lights and color, looking like fireworks caught in midburst. At midships, the three-deck atrium offers a curvaceous, aquiline feel, with a baby grand on a glass platform and stairways sweeping between the decks. Lounges, bars, shops, an Internet center, a card room, a small library, and an art gallery all radiate out from the atrium on its various levels.

Most public rooms are clustered on the two upper atrium decks, including a showroom; a large casino; a cigar lounge with comfy leather armchairs; and a bright wine bar lit by faux skylights and serving vintages from all over Italy (with complimentary cheeses and meats to match). At the top of the ship, the disco mixes touches of Deco styling with a futuristic dance-floor vibe.

For kids, there's an indoor play area with PlayStations, games, arts and crafts supplies, and more. There's also an enclosed outdoor area with a play structure, tube slide, wading pool, and other amenities.

DINING OPTIONS *Poesia* offers two main dining rooms, a buffet restaurant, an evening pizzeria, and a terrific a la carte Chinese restaurant. The main dining rooms are both single-level spaces, one decorated in traditional fashion, the other more sleekly modern. Ceilings in these restaurants are a bit too low, making for loud meals. Breakfast and lunch are served in the spacious buffet restaurant, with multiple lines serving different specialties, and dishes labeled in both Italian and English. At night, part of the buffet restaurant is partitioned off to create 4 Seasons, a fixed-price restaurant serving a more refined version of Italian cuisine than the main restaurants, with waiter service.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The main Pool Deck is an expansive space with a Mediterranean vibe and two separate pool areas linked by a pair of deck bars and elevated seating areas for those who want to see or be seen. There are two pools and four Jacuzzis in all, plus a movie screen above the forward pool area. A separate small sun deck immediately under the screen offers a remove from the busier main deck below. Like those aboard all MSC ships, lounge chairs on *Poesia* have their own attached sun canopies—a neat feature we haven't seen on other lines. The jogging track wraps around one deck above the pool (though don't try running during pool times, as the deck chairs take over), while a miniature golf course, quoits, shuffleboard, and sports court are located on Deck 15 aft.

Indoors, the ship's stunning Balinese-themed spa, operated by Italy's OceanView, offers the usual range of massage, wellness, and beauty treatments, all in a lovely, relaxing atmosphere with hints of exotica, including two Turkish baths (one for women, one for men) with beautiful decorative tile-work. The 12 massage rooms are gorgeous, each having its own theme and aroma. A pre- or post-treatment relaxation room offers views, lounge chairs, and hydromassage pools (plus a thalassotherapy pool in an adjacent room); it's open for free to all guests for an hour at a time, by reservation. The juice bar offers a menu of energy drinks and fresh fruit cocktails, usually from noon to 8pm. Nearby, the ship's gym is pretty small for a vessel this size, but it has a great forward view through floor-to-ceiling windows. The treadmills, aerobics machines, and weights get a lot of use, and there aren't really enough of them.

9 Norwegian Cruise Line

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THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL NCL may be the most mainstream of the mainstream lines these days—and we mean that in a good way. At a time when every line seems to be pushing the quote/unquote "luxury" elements of their onboard program, NCL hews to the center, with always-casual dining (and lots of it); bright, cheerful decor; and such fun innovations as onboard bowling alleys and gourmet beer bars. Its newest vessels are the most fun megaships at sea, and it's the go-to line for Hawaii cruises. Nutshell? NCL's the kind of cruise line you want to sit down and have a beer with. **Sails to:** Caribbean, The Bahamas, Panama Canal, Alaska, Mexican Riviera, Bermuda, Hawaii, Canada/New England, Pacific Coast (plus South America, Europe).

THE EXPERIENCE Back in the mid- to late '90s, NCL operated a mixed-bag fleet of older ships whose onboard vibe was only a couple steps above budget. Fast-forward 10 years and presto-chango: NCL is now one of the top players in the industry, with innovative itineraries, a fleet of new megaships, a casual onboard atmosphere, top-drawer entertainment, and a staggering number of dining choices. The line was the first to dump the old system of formal/informal/casual nights, going totally casual and starting a trend across the industry. The new program also did away with fixed dining times and seating assignments, leaving passengers free to choose when and where they want to dine among a variety of venues. Traditional tipping also went away, replaced by a system where gratuities are added directly to passenger accounts. Busy, busy, busy they've been, and it shows. This is one fun cruise line.

Pros

- **Fun:** There's no pretension at NCL. Their ships are designed to be fun and they really *are* fun, designed like bright, interactive playrooms for adults.
- **Flexible dining:** NCL's Freestyle Cruising policy lets you dine when and where you want, dressed "however."
- **Restaurants galore:** With between 6 and 10 places to have dinner, your taste buds won't be bored.
- **Above-average entertainment:** In addition to above-average Vegas-style shows and musical groups, NCL also offers comedy shows by the Second City comedy troupe aboard its newer ships.
- **Hawaii-centricity:** If you want to sail the islands, NCL's U.S.-flagged sub-brand, NCL America, offers the only cruises that never leave state waters.

Cons

- **Small cabins:** Though with each new ship they seem to get a little bigger, the standard inside and low-end outside cabins are a tighter squeeze than you find at most of the competition.

NCL: SAY HELLO TO INNOVATION

Talk about pulling yourself up by your bootstraps. Though Norwegian was one of the pioneers of the North American cruise market, begun in 1966 as an alliance between Norwegian ship owner Knut Kloster and Israeli marketing genius Ted Arison (who later started Carnival), it spent many years relegated to the industry's back seat behind biggies Carnival and Royal Caribbean. In 1997, though (and especially since its purchase by Asian line Star Cruises in 2000), it began a sequence of moves that transformed it into a true leader and innovator.

First it went casual, knocking the whole industry on its ear and prompting many other lines to revamp their dining policies and dress codes. Then it took over the Hawaii market by launching the first U.S.-flagged cruise ships in decades (a legal requirement for operating ships entirely within U.S. waters). What's next? Going modern. As part of an ongoing upgrade, the line has sold off all of its older vessels, with the last of them, 1992's *Norwegian Majesty,* going to Cyprus-based Louis Cruises in November 2009. That leaves NCL with an extremely up-to-date fleet of modern vessels all launched in the past 11 years. The most modern of all is the 150,000-ton, 4,200-passenger *Norwegian Epic,* which is currently under construction at French shipbuilder Aker Yards S.A. That ship is currently scheduled to debut in May 2010, sailing alternating 7-night eastern and western Caribbean itineraries.

Compared with the other mainstream lines, here's how NCL rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor					✓
Dining				✓	
Activities				✓	
Children's Program				✓	
Entertainment				✓	
Service				✓	
Worth the Money					✓

PASSENGER PROFILE

In general, NCL passengers are younger and more active than those aboard lines such as HAL, Celebrity, and Princess. Typical NCL passengers are couples ages 25 to 60, and include a fair number of honeymooners and families with kids during summers and holidays. Kids under age 2 travel free (though they're still charged taxes and fees). The atmosphere aboard all NCL vessels is informal and well suited to casual types, party-makers, and both first-time and experienced cruisers.

DINING

All the restaurants on NCL ships follow an open-seating policy each and every evening, allowing you to dine whenever you like within the 5:30 to 10pm window, sit with whomever you want (rather than having a table preassigned), and dress however you like: Management says anything goes except jeans, shorts, and tank tops, but we've seen those in the restaurants, too. This flexible setup really works for families, groups, and anyone else who doesn't want to be tied down to fixed timings and tables, and who hates the idea of having to chat with the same bunch of dinner companions all week. If you end up sitting with people you do like, you can always make plans to dine with them again.

The night of the captain's cocktail party is officially an **"optional formal" night,** meaning you can wear a suit, tie, or fancy dress if you like, but no one will complain if you don't. That said, we've been surprised on recent cruises at just how many people did dress up.

TRADITIONAL The main dining rooms, like the rest of the ships' eating venues, operate with open seating and casual dress codes, so the only really "traditional" thing about them is their size and a touch of traditional ocean-liner elegance. For cuisine, you can usually count on such choices as grilled swordfish with lemon-caper sauce, salmon or poached sea bass, beef Wellington, broiled lobster tail, chicken Parmesan, fettuccine Alfredo, or perhaps a Jamaican jerk pork roast, Wiener schnitzel, or roast prime rib. And lobster fans take note: As part of a recent initiative, your favorite crustacean will be available in the main restaurant on multiple days and in one or another of the specialty restaurants every night of the cruise.

The NCL wine lists appeal to standard mid-American tastes, and prices aren't offensively high.

A **light choice** (prepared with recipes from NCL partner *Cooking Light* magazine) and a **vegetarian entree** are available at lunch and dinner. **Children's menus** feature the popular standards (burgers, hot dogs, grilled cheese sandwiches and french fries, spaghetti and meatballs, ice-cream sundaes, and so on), plus unexpected dishes like vegetable crudités and cheese dip.

SPECIALTY In addition to one or two main dining rooms, all the NCL ships have between six and eight alternative specialty restaurants serving food that's on a par with all but the very best of the competition. Each ship has a French/Continental restaurant called **Le Bistro** plus choices such as Pan-Asian, Italian, Japanese, Pacific Rim, and Tex-Mex tapas (see the individual ship reviews for which ship has what). The food in Le Bistro is better than that in the main dining rooms, and includes items such as Caesar salad made right at your table and a marvelously decadent chocolate fondue served with fresh fruit (both by request only). Tables are sometimes available for walk-ins, but make your reservations as early as possible to be on the safe side.

Preview: *Norwegian Epic*

In May 2010, NCL will become only the second line (after Royal Caribbean) to launch a ship larger than 150,000 gross tons. Named *Norwegian Epic,* the huge vessel was to be the first of three identical 4,200-passenger sister ships that would take NCL to the next step. Unfortunately, a major dispute with the shipyard over costs scuttled that plan, and at this point *Norwegian Epic* looks like she'll be an only child in the mold of that other one-off enormoship, Cunard's *Queen Mary 2.*

In any case, she looks to be pretty hip. To date, NCL has revealed a handful of details about *Epic*'s onboard attractions. For instance, she'll feature . . .

- **Curvy cabins:** "New Wave" cabins will be a big departure from cruise tradition, featuring free-form, curving walls rather than the oblong boxes typical of every ship today except Celebrity's *Solstice* and *Equinox.* Other cabin features include concealed contour LED lighting, backlit domed ceilings, dark-wood trim, and an earth-tone color palette.
- **The first inside cabins designed for hipsters:** A new class of "Studio" staterooms created for the budget-conscious also seem to have been created for the fashion-conscious: They're sleek and ultramodern and designed for maximize space efficiency, with a double bed, a large round window that looks out onto the corridor, and customizable lighting so that your cabin can match your mood. It even includes what NCL is calling a "love setting." All passengers booked into the Studio cabins get exclusive key-card access to the Living Room, a shared, two-story private lounge with its own bar, room service, two large-screen TVs, comfortable seating, and a concierge.
- **The cruise world's first ice bar:** Inspired by the ice bars and ice hotels in Scandinavia, *Epic*'s will feature a bar, walls, tables, stools, glasses, and lifesize sculptures all made from ice. Located on Deck 7, the Ice Bar will be kept at about 17° Fahrenheit and will accommodate 25 guests, who will be given fur coats, gloves, and hats to keep warm. Blue, green, and purple LED lighting will simulate the Northern Lights. Guests will pay a cover charge that will include one or more drinks.
- **The POSH Beach Club:** Adult guests can purchase a POSH day-pass and ride a private glass elevator to this outdoor entertainment complex, where

Most of the specialty restaurants carry a cover charge, which ranges from $10 to $20 per person. Even with a reservations system, it inevitably happens that you'll sometimes have to wait for a table, but NCL's working on that too. At this writing, *Spirit, Jewel, Pearl, Gem, Pride of America, Norwegian Sky,* and *Norwegian Jade* (the latter sailing in Europe in 2010) feature large **computerized billboard screens** placed outside restaurants and in various public areas. Each displays a listing of every restaurant on board (with photos and a description of the cuisine), along with the restaurant's status (open/closed), how busy it is at that moment, how close it is to filling up, and how long a wait there will be if it *is* filled up. For those who don't like to plan too far ahead, it's a great boon: You can head out for the evening and just decide where to

four different experiences are offered throughout the day. From 6 to 9am, the area is used for yoga classes and body-and-soul treatments in private cabanas. From 9am to noon, POSH Rehab offers recovery from the night before with salty dogs, bloody Marys, and mimosas, as well as a soundtrack of chill-out tunes. From noon to 6pm, POSH Sol allows guests to lounge on the white-cushioned daybeds and in private cabanas, or cool off in the 35-foot cascading waterfall while eating spiked snow cones. Finally, Pure POSH goes from 8pm until "late" as the areas transforms into an open-air nightclub with DJ entertainment and VIP bottle service.

- **Spice H20 adults-only pool:** Located in the stern on top decks 15 and 16, this adults-only area features tiers of daybeds and a pool, behind which is a huge video screen. As at POSH, days will be divided into four moods: Sunny Spice (8–11am) offers spicy bloody Mary's, "Spicitinis," and breakfast food; Aqua Spice (11am–4pm) is prime sunning time, with guests able to order Asian margaritas, an international selection of beer, and "Asian-inspired food" served in Chinese to-go containers; and Sunset Spice (4–9pm) offers live entertainment, champagne, and a food menu that isn't available anywhere else on the ship. As the sun sets, it becomes a more intimate environment with Spanish guitars and dancers setting the vibe. In the evening, All Spice (9pm until "late") features a dance and acrobatics performance, followed by general dancing on a floor that rises from the pool.
- **Halo, the Uber Bar:** Like NCL's current crop of vessels, *Epic* will feature top-level Garden Villa and Courtyard Villa accommodations, with their own private sundecks, courtyards, and other perks. *Epic* will feature one-third more Courtyard Villas than all of her fleetmates combined, and the area will also feature Halo, a private bar located on Deck 16 and offering what the line calls "the best of the best," from liquor to art and jewelry for sale—and gambling, of course, in the form of private baccarat and blackjack tables.

Epic will debut with alternating 7-night eastern and western Caribbean itineraries. The western itinerary includes stops in Costa Maya and Cozumel (Mexico) and Roatán (Honduras), while the eastern route stops at St. Maarten, St. Thomas, and Nassau.

dine on the fly. Maitre d's at every restaurant can take reservations at any of the other restaurants too, so if one looks like it's filling up you won't have to sprint to catch that last table—just amble to the nearest restaurant and have them call ahead for you. The system will eventually be rolled out to *Norwegian Sun, Norwegian Star,* and *Norwegian Dawn,* though no date has yet been set. It'll also eventually be available fleetwide through a new interactive TV system that's in the works. To get a taste of what each restaurant offers, NCL now has samples available from all of them on embarkation day. Just drop by for a taste.

One or two alternative restaurants are open for **lunch** as well as dinner on every sea day.

CASUAL In addition to the numerous sit-down venues highlighted above (all of them casual in their own way), all NCL ships also have a buffet restaurant with indoor/outdoor seating open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. In addition to the usual meats, salads, pastas, and desserts, NCL buffets often include stations serving stir-fry dishes and all-vegetarian Indian spreads. See the ship reviews for more details.

SNACKS & EXTRAS Snacking ops include pizza and ice cream offered throughout the day from the buffet restaurant, a coffee bar serving specialty java and other beverages, and 24-hour room service for pizza, sandwiches, and other munchies. Food is also available 24 hours a day at the Blue Lagoon restaurant aboard *Norwegian Star, Dawn, Spirit, Jewel, Pearl,* and *Gem;* at the sports bar on *Norwegian Sun;* and at the Cadillac Diner on *Pride of America.* One night a week (on all but the Hawaii ship), you can also drool over the popular **Chocoholic Extravaganza** buffet, offering everything from tortes to brownies.

ACTIVITIES

NCL offers all the usual cruise activities, plus some new, unusual ones to spice things up, including **improv comedy,** organic cooking, and bartending. You can also take cha-cha lessons; watch a cooking demo; play bingo, shuffleboard, or basketball; attend an art auction or spa or beauty demonstration; and, on some cruises, sit in on enrichment lectures about classic ocean liners, nutrition, personal investing, or other topics. There are snorkeling demonstrations in the pool, makeovers, talent shows, wine tastings (for $15 per person), and trivia contests, plus your classic cruise ship "silly poolside games." In Hawaii, *Pride of America* offers many activities themed on **Hawaiian arts and culture,** while *Norwegian Pearl* and *Norwegian Gem* have the modern cruise world's first full-size, four-lane, 10-pin **bowling alleys.**

Internet cafes offer e-mail and Internet access fleetwide. For those wanting flexibility in their Web surfing, a Wi-Fi system lets you log on from various places on board using your own or a rented laptop and an NCL network card. You can also use your **cellphone** through an onboard relay system (see chapter 3 for more about cellphone usage). In Hawaii, *Pride of America* sails close enough to shore that signals get picked up by regular land towers.

Gyms fleetwide are open 24 hours and offer free stretching, step, aerobics, and other traditional classes. Spinning, kickboxing, Pilates, yoga, and other trendy choices cost an extra $10. All ships have golf driving cages where guests can practice at their leisure. In port, NCL's **Dive-In program** offers at least one snorkeling and one scuba excursion at almost every Caribbean port, escorted by the ship's certified instructors. In Hawaii and Bermuda, the line offers a comprehensive program of **golf excursions** to some of the islands' best courses, including Puakea, Poipu Bay, Princeville, and Kaua'i Lagoons (Kauai); Mauna Lani Resort, Hapuna, and Big Island Country Club (Hawaii); Makena, Wailea, and The Dunes at Maui Lani (Maui); Ko'olau Golf Club (Oahu); and the Ocean View, Belmont Hills, Mid Ocean, Port Royal, Tucker's Point, St. George's, and Riddell's Bay courses (Bermuda). *Pride of America,* the line's full-time Hawaii ship, also has an onboard pro shop.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

NCL's Kids Crew program offers year-round **supervised activities** for children ages 2 to 17, divided into four age groups: Junior Sailors, ages 2 to 5; First Mates, ages 6 to 9; Navigators, ages 10 to 12; and teens, ages 13 to 17. Activities include sports competitions, dances, face painting, treasure hunts, magic shows, arts and crafts, cooking

NCL Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Dawn	**Caribbean:** 9-night southern, r/t Miami (Jan–Mar & Nov–Dec). 5-night western, r/t Miami (Jan–Apr & Nov–Dec). 12-night, New York to Miami (Oct). **Bermuda:** 7-night, r/t New York (Apr–Sept). **Canada/New England:** 7-night, r/t New York (Sept–Oct).
Epic	**Caribbean:** 7-night eastern & western, r/t Miami (July–Dec).
Gem	**Cruises to Nowhere:** 1-night, r/t New York (Jan). **Caribbean:** 10-night eastern, r/t New York (Jan–Feb). **Bahamas/Florida:** 7-night, r/t New York (Feb–Apr).
Jewel	**Caribbean:** 7-night western, r/t Miami (Jan–Apr). **Canada/New England:** 10- & 14-night, r/t New York (Sept–Oct). **Cruises to Nowhere:** 2-night, r/t New York (Oct). **Bahamas/Florida:** 7-night, r/t New York (Oct–Dec).
Pearl	**Caribbean:** 7-night eastern, r/t Miami (Jan–Apr & Oct–Dec). 7-night western, r/t Miami (Oct–Dec). **Panama Canal:** 14-night, Miami to Los Angeles (Apr) & Los Angeles to Miami (Sept). **U.S. West Coast & British Columbia:** 7-night, Los Angeles to Vancouver (Apr). 5-night, Vancouver to Los Angeles (Sept). **Alaska:** 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Seattle (May–Sept). **Cruises to Nowhere:** 2-night, r/t Miami (Oct).
Pride of America	**Hawaii:** 7-night, r/t Honolulu (year-round).
Sky	**Bahamas:** 3- & 4-night, r/t Miami (year-round).
Spirit	**Caribbean:** 7-night western, r/t New Orleans (Jan–Apr & Nov–Dec). 14-night, New Orleans to Boston (Apr). 15-night Boston to New Orleans (Oct). **Bermuda:** 7-night, r/t Boston (Apr–Sept). **Cruises to Nowhere:** 1-night, r/t Boston (Sept). **Canada/New England:** 7-night, north- & southbound between Boston & Québec City (Sept–Oct).
Star	**Panama Canal:** 14-night, east- & westbound between Los Angeles & Miami (Jan & Nov–Dec). **Mexican Riviera:** 7-night, r/t Los Angeles (Jan, Mar–Apr & Oct–Dec). **U.S. West Coast & British Columbia:** 7-night, north- & southbound between Los Angeles and Vancouver (May & Sept). **Alaska:** 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Seattle (May–Sept).
Sun	**U.S. West Coast & British Columbia:** 3-night, Los Angeles to Vancouver (Apr). 4-night, Vancouver to Los Angeles (Sept). **Alaska:** 7-night Gulf of Alaska, north- & southbound between Vancouver & Whittier/Anchorage (May–Sept). **Panama Canal:** 16-night, Los Angeles to Port Canaveral (Sept). **Caribbean:** 7-night eastern & western, r/t Port Canaveral (Sept–Dec).

classes, T-shirt painting, and the Officer Snook Water Pollution Program, which uses games, crafts, storytelling, and other activities to educate young people about the effects of marine pollution and ways to prevent it. **Family events** such as pizza-making parties and scavenger hunts are also on the schedule, and kids get their own daily program detailing the day's events.

All the most recent NCL ships offer huge **kids' facilities** that include a separate teen center and a wading pool, as well as a large, well-stocked playroom. Those on *Dawn, Star,* and *Spirit* are especially wonderful, with a huge combo climbing maze and ball bin indoors, and an outdoor kids' pool and hot tub area themed on dinosaurs *(Dawn),* rockets *(Star),* and pirates *(Spirit). Jewel, Gem,* and *Pride of America* have a much smaller kids' pool. On sea days, youth programs are offered 9am to noon, 2 to 5pm, and then 7 to 10pm; on port days the complimentary hours are from 7 to 10pm. Port program times can also be adjusted to accommodate parents on shore excursions.

Once per cruise the ships offer a **Mom and Dad's Night Out,** when kids dine with counselors. Otherwise, **group babysitting** for kids ages 2 to 12 is offered nightly between 10pm and 1am (and 9am–5pm on port days) for $5 per child per hour, plus $3 an hour for each additional sibling. Counselors do not do diapers; parents are given beepers so that they can be alerted when it's time for the dirty work. Private babysitting is not available.

Unlimited soda packages are $16 for kids under age 17 on 7-night cruises, and a Teen Passport coupon book is available for teens—for $30 they get up to 20 nonalcoholic drinks such as virgin daiquiris.

ENTERTAINMENT

NCL offers some of the best entertainment of all the mainstream lines, including (aboard *Dawn, Jewel, Sprit, Pearl,* and *Gem*) sketch comedy shows by members of the famed **Second City comedy troupe,** which launched the careers of such legends as Bill Murray, John Belushi, and Gilda Radner. **Production shows** are way above average too, with talented performers and good choreography, costumes, and set design. A show called *Tubez,* offered aboard *Pearl* in 2007, was one of the few truly contemporary shows we've ever seen at sea, with a mix of older and recent pop hits, hip-hop-inflected choreography and ballet, a rapper as the lead male vocalist, and bizarro elements like BMX bicycle acrobatics. Bollywood- and South Beach–inspired shows in recent years have also been standouts. Ditto for most of the other performers, including the musicians and comedians who play the ships' lounge circuit. On *Pride of America*'s Hawaii itineraries, 1 night a week is devoted to **Polynesian music and dance,** while another features an extracharge production of the interactive off-Broadway hit ***Tony n' Tina's Wedding.*** The new *Norwegian Epic* will feature performances by the **Blue Man Group,** as well as an interactive, 2-hour dinner theater show staged by **Cirque du Soleil.**

For closet entertainers, the line puts on **Star Seeker,** an *American Idol* kind of talent program that gives adults and kids the chance to prove themselves onstage. Videos of the performances serve as audition tapes for NCL's shore-side entertainment department, which sometimes hires the winners for one-time performances aboard a future (free) NCL cruise.

Big gamblers should avoid *Pride of America,* as Hawaiian law prohibits all gambling onboard.

SERVICE

Fleetwide, cabin service, room service, bar service, and dining service tend to be speedy and efficient.

In Hawaii, ***Pride of America*** **has an all-American service staff**—the only one on a ship this size. On the plus side, they're almost uniformly friendly and helpful, and there are no English-as-a-second-language problems to deal with. On the downside, some can be just a touch too casual. What are you gonna do? We are who we are. *Sumus quod sumus.*

Fleetwide, tipping is done automatically, with a $12-per-day **service charge** added to each passenger's onboard account ($5 for kids 3–12). Though officially nonrefundable, the charge can be adjusted if you've experienced serious problems that the customer-service staff was unable to remedy.

NCL ships offer **laundry** and **dry-cleaning service.** *Norwegian Dawn, Jewel, Pearl,* and *Gem* all have self-service launderettes and ironing facilities for guests, and all ships have ironing boards and irons available from housekeeping upon request.

Passengers booked in balcony cabins, minisuites, and suites can access the services of a dedicated **concierge hot line** to make restaurant reservations, and so on.

Norwegian Spirit • Star • Dawn • Jewel • Pearl • Gem

Norwegian Pearl *(photo: NCL)*

The Verdict

Has someone finally built megaships for Generations X and Y? With a mix of classy and fun spaces, a lively atmosphere, awesome kids' facilities, and an amazing number of restaurant options, these are some of the most original mainstream megaships to come along in years.

Specifications

Size (in tons)		Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	
Spirit	76,800	*Spirit*	980/390
Star	91,000	*Star*	1,120/515
Dawn	92,250	*Dawn*	1,112/509
Jewel	93,502	*Jewel/Pearl/Gem*	1,188/510
Pearl	93,530	Crew	
Gem	93,000	*Spirit*	965
Passengers (double occ.)		*Star*	1,100
Spirit	1,966	*Dawn*	1,126
Star	2,240	*Jewel/Pearl/Gem*	1,150
Dawn	2,224	Passenger/Crew Ratio	2 to 1
Jewel	2,376	Year Launched	
Pearl	2,394	*Spirit*	1999
Gem	2,380	*Star*	2001
Passenger/Space Ratio		*Dawn*	2002
Spirit	39.1	*Jewel*	2005
Star	41.5	*Pearl*	2006
Dawn	41.5	*Gem*	2007
Jewel	39.4	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Pearl/Gem	39	*Spirit*	2004

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

★★★★½–★★★★★

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	5
Appearance & Upkeep	5	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	5
Decor	4.5	Enjoyment Factor	4.5

* *More fully realized than their sister ships,* Norwegian Jewel, Pearl, *and* Gem *earn a five-star rating.*

These seven sexy sisters are the most fun megaships at sea today, offering a supersocial atmosphere, creative decor, and onboard music and pop culture references tailored to a surprisingly youngish demographic—generally, from folks in their 20s to folks in their 50s. Are these the Generation X and Y megaships? Could be.

The word of the day is "options." Want fun? How about *Spirit*'s Maharini's Lounge, with its bordello-like, velvet-draped seating nooks (with beds even!), or the Bliss Ultra Lounge on *Pearl* and *Gem,* which juxtaposes the same bordello decor with a four-lane, Day-Glo bowling alley. Want food? These ships offer 8 to 10 different restaurants apiece, from fancy steakhouses and *teppanyaki* restaurants to casual Tex-Mex and burger joints. Want fantasy? The nightclubs and atriums feature furniture right out of *Alice in Wonderland.* Want high style? Check out *Dawn*'s and *Star*'s Gatsby's Champagne Bar, and *Jewel*'s, *Pearl*'s, and *Gem*'s Bar Central on Deck 6.

Want extravagance? These ships' Garden Villas spread out up to an astonishing 5,350 square feet, making them the largest suites at sea today. Each features private gardens, multiple bedrooms with mind-blowing bathrooms, separate living rooms, full kitchens, and private butler service. Zowie! Zowie, too, on their price: about $13,750 per person, per week, for the first two guests, and $499 for each additional (up to a maximum of six people). Normal cabins, on the other hand, come at normal prices.

Overall, these ships are nearly identical in layout, though *Norwegian Spirit,* which came to NCL from the Star Cruises fleet, is slightly smaller and has a slightly different layout. A seventh sister, *Norwegian Jade,* is currently sailing year-round in Europe.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$94	142	yes	yes	yes	yes
Outside	$124	158–205	yes	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$221	229–5,350	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS Standard cabins, though not overly large compared to some in the industry (particularly those of Carnival's and Holland America's ships), are larger than elsewhere in the NCL fleet. Decor is a mix, with stylish elements (such as cherrywood wall paneling and snazzy rounded lights), kitschy elements (such as bright island-colored carpeting), and cheap touches (such as some spindly chairs and end tables, and wall-mounted soap dispensers in the bathrooms). Each comes with a small TV and minifridge, a tea/coffeemaker, a private safe, and cool, retro-looking hair dryers. Closet and drawer space are more than ample for weeklong sailings, and bathrooms in all categories are well designed, with large sinks whose faucets swing out of the way, a magnifying mirror inset in the regular mirror, adequate though not exceptional counter/shelf space, and (in all but inside cabins) separate shower and toilet compartments. Balconies in standard cabins accommodate two metal chairs and a small table, but aren't terribly roomy.

Minisuites provide about 60 more feet of floor space than standard cabins, with a large foldout couch, a curtain between the bed and the sitting area, and a bathtub. The so-called Romance Suites really are, with 288 square feet of space, stereo with CD/DVD library, bathroom with separate shower and tub, and nice wooden deck chairs on the balcony. Penthouse Suites offer the same, plus gorgeous bathrooms with

a whirlpool tub and tiled, seaview shower stall; a larger balcony; and a walk-in closet. Some suites offer a separate kids' room and bathroom. Those facing the bow on Decks 9 and 10 have large windows and deep balconies, but safety requirements mandate that instead of a nice glass door, the balconies are accessed via an honest-to-God steel bulkhead that's marked, FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY, OPEN ONLY WHEN THE VESSEL IS IN PORT.

The ships' Owner's Suites are huge, with two balconies, living and dining areas, powder room, guest bathroom, and 750 square feet of space. Compared to the two Garden Villas up on Deck 14, though, these suites are peasant's quarters. The Garden Villas are, in a word, H-U-G-E, the biggest at sea today, with three bedrooms, enormous living rooms, private Italian gardens with hot tubs, panoramic views all around, private butler service, grand pianos, and totally extravagant seaview bathrooms with whirlpool tubs. They're priced beyond the range of . . . well, pretty much everybody. *Norwegian Jewel, Pearl,* and *Gem* have an intermediate level of smaller Courtyard Villas on the same top-of-the-ship deck as the Garden Villa. They offer spacious suite accommodations coupled with access to a villa-guests-only courtyard, a private sun deck, and a staffed concierge lounge. The courtyard is a stunner, with a small private swimming pool, hot tub, and several plush, shaded sun beds. The suites (which open to a hallway around the courtyard rather than right into it) are also knockouts, with a separate bedroom and living/dining room; a huge, gorgeously appointed bathroom with oceanview whirlpool tub and shower; large private balcony; and floor space that ranges from 440 to 572 square feet. The larger Courtyard Penthouses also offer a separate children's room with foldout couch bed and second bathroom. Prices for Courtyard Villas tend to hover in the $4,400-to-$5,400 range for weeklong itineraries.

Four cabins are wheelchair accessible aboard *Spirit,* as are 20 on *Star,* 24 on *Dawn,* and 27 on *Jewel, Pearl,* and *Gem.*

PUBLIC AREAS You'll be in a party mood from the moment you step aboard into the ships' large, broad atrium lobbies. Public areas throughout the vessels are fanciful and extremely spacious, done in a mix of bright, Caribbean- and Miami-themed decor and high-style Art Deco, with lots of nooks and some downright wonderful lounges and bars mixed in among all the restaurant choices.

On the main entertainment deck, a multideck theater has a thousand seats sloping down to a large stage. There's also a nightclub for smaller-scale cabaret entertainment and dancing. Deck 12 features a complex of "sit-down" rooms, including a comfortable cinema with traditional theater seats, a library, a card room, a reading room, a "lifestyles" room (used for classes, private functions, and so on), several meeting rooms, and a small wedding chapel. Forward of these is an observation lounge/disco with some fanciful *Alice in Wonderland* seating. Up top, on Deck 13, there's a nice bar/lounge with piano entertainment in the evening. *Dawn, Spirit,* and *Star* offer a British-themed pub with piano entertainment, a big-screen TV for sports, and tasty fish and chips; and *Spirit* and *Star* also feature a covered outdoor Bier Garten stocked with German pilsner, *hefeweizen,* and wheat beers. *Jewel, Pearl,* and *Gem* instead have three themed bars clustered together in a Bar Central arrangement on Deck 6. Their beer and whiskey bars are the best at sea, with 46 beers and 63 whiskies to choose from. Next door are a martini/cocktail bar and a champagne/wine bar.

Aboard *Spirit,* Maharini's combines Bollywood Indian themes with a kind of fashion-world ambience, its mood-lit nooks separated by thick red-velvet curtains and outfitted with large, comfortable daybeds strewn with pillows. Sexy! The similarly

decorated Bliss Ultra Lounges on *Pearl* and *Gem* add four 10-pin bowling lanes to the bordello vibe, gaining NCL points for retro-chic credibility.

Other rooms include a spacious casino, an Internet center, several shops, and a coffee bar.

For kids, these ships have some of the better facilities at sea, with a huge, brightly colored crafts/play area, a big-screen TV room stuffed full of beanbag chairs, a huge ball jump/crawling maze play-gym, and a computer room. Outside, the pool areas on *Dawn, Star,* and *Spirit* are fantastic. On *Dawn,* it's right out of *The Flintstones,* with giant polka-dotted dinosaurs hovering around faux rock walls, slides, a paddling pool, and even a kids' Jacuzzi. *Star*'s has a space-age rocket theme. *Norwegian Jewel, Pearl,* and *Gem* have much smaller outdoor play areas. There are video arcades and teen centers on all six ships, with computers, a dance floor equipped with a sound/video system, and a soda bar.

DINING OPTIONS These ships are all about their restaurants, with between 8 and 10 options on each—two or three main formal restaurants plus a buffet, at least one casual diner/cafe, and several alternative specialty restaurants serving Italian, steakhouse, French/Continental, and Asian cuisine. The Asian restaurants include three separate experiences: a main Asian-fusion restaurant, a sushi and sake bar, and an intimate Japanese *teppanyaki* room where meals are prepared from the center of the table as guests look on. The high-end French/Continental restaurant, Le Bistro, serves classic and nouvelle cuisine in an atmosphere of floral tapestry upholstery and fine place settings. On *Dawn,* Le Bistro is adorned with original Impressionist paintings by Matisse and Monet, while *Pearl* has paintings by van Gogh and Renoir, all lent from the private collection of Tan Sri Lim Kok Thay, chairman and CEO of NCL's parent company, Star Cruises. All the ships but *Spirit* also have a casual Tex-Mex/tapas eatery. *Star* has a restaurant serving Pacific Rim cuisine. Specialty restaurants cost between $10 and $20 per person.

Out on deck, each ship has a casual grill serving up burgers, dogs, and fries during the day.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES Main pool areas have the feel of a resort, ringed by flower-shaped "streetlamps," deck chairs arrayed around the central pool and hot tubs, and (on *Star, Jewel, Pearl,* and *Gem*) a large corkscrew water slide. A huge bar, running almost the width of the ship, serves ice cream on one side, drinks on the other. Nice space, but the real plaudits go to the stylish spas, with the one aboard *Dawn* taking the prize. At the entrance, its sunlit foyer rises three decks high and is decorated with plants and Maya reliefs, with a juice bar on the side. Inside, the spa is centered on a kind of "aqua suite" with a large lap pool, hot tub, jet-massage pool, and sunny windowed seating areas furnished with wooden deck chairs, all of it hearkening back to the indoor pools on the classic transatlantic liners. *Spirit* also has Aqua Swim, a room with two stationary lap pools. *Jewel, Pearl,* and *Gem* have four of the better onboard gyms of recent years—large and extremely well appointed, with dozens of fitness machines and a large aerobics/spinning room.

Outside there's an extralong jogging track, a sports court for basketball and volleyball, golf-driving nets, and facilities for shuffleboard and deck chess, plus acres of open deck space for sunning. *Dawn* and *Star* offer a nice spot on the tiered Sun Deck, where a lone hot tub looks out over the bow. *Spirit,* on the other hand, has a beautiful tiered, amphitheater-like stern looking down to a pirate-themed kids' pool.

Pride of America

The Verdict

Sailing from Honolulu, concentrating solely on the islands, and carrying an American crew, this vessel is literally in a class by itself.

Pride of America *(photo: NCL)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	81,000	Crew	1,000
Passengers (double occ.)	2,146	Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.1 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio	37.7	Year Launched	2005
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	1,073/665	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	N/A

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

★★★★

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	5
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4
Public Comfort/Space	4	Children's Facilities	4
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	5

Because *Pride of America* is U.S.-flagged and U.S.-crewed, she's in compliance with U.S. cabotage laws, and that means she is legally permitted to sail entirely within U.S. waters, visiting only U.S. ports—and that makes her quite literally unique: There is no other large cruise ship in the world that can say the same. Because of this distinction, she's the only big cruiser offering cruises that operate entirely within Hawaiian waters, sailing round-trip from Honolulu. Because Hawaii's islands are all relatively close together, that means she's able to visit a Hawaiian port every single day, and even do overnights in Kauai and Maui, giving you an opportunity to sample nightlife ashore and get a better feel for both of these beautiful islands. During the week, you get to choose from some 150 excursion options, creating a Hawaii itinerary to suit your preferences.

On the downside, this is a busy, noisy ship—especially in summer and during holidays, when many families with kids sail. Things can get tight out on deck, in lines for buffets and early dinners at the restaurants, and sometimes getting on and off ship in port. Also, because these cruises put so much emphasis on the port experience, with many excursions starting in early morning and taking up most of the day, passengers tend to come back to the ship, eat an early dinner, and crash from exhaustion. Translation: If you want a cruise with lots of onboard activities and a heavy nightlife, this isn't the one for you. Lastly, although prices for the cruises themselves are relatively low, expect lots of extra costs, from the $12-a-day automatic gratuity to expensive drinks, pricey Internet access, and the bundle you're bound to spend on shore excursions or renting cars in port. (Because most of the islands' real attractions aren't near the port facilities, you have to take an excursion or rent a car if you want to see anything worth seeing.)

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$114	121–147	yes	yes	yes	yes
Outside	$128	149–243	yes	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$414	321–4,390	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS Cabins on *Pride* are pretty—with most sporting wood-grain walls, and carpets, upholstery, and bedspreads done in vibrant, Hawaiian-accented pinks, blues, oranges, purples, and greens—but they tend to be small, with the vast majority of standard outside and inside cabins measuring about 40 square feet smaller than those aboard Carnival. Storage space is fairly limited. All have a small sitting area or desk, a minifridge, a hair dryer, TVs, coffee- and tea-making equipment, plus a dataport to accommodate laptop users. Bathrooms are adequately sized. Balcony cabins come in particularly handy on the nighttime run between Kona and Hilo, letting you watch the lava flowing from Kilauea Volcano without changing out of your pajamas. The captain turns the ship 360 degrees at the optimum viewing point, so cabins on both sides get a view. The majority of outside cabins have balconies, including cabins located almost all the way forward (some to port and starboard, some facing front with recessed balconies).

Twenty-three cabins are equipped for wheelchairs. The ship offers laundry and dry-cleaning service but does not have self-serve launderettes.

PUBLIC AREAS *Pride of America*'s decor matches her name, with public rooms throughout decorated to celebrate aspects of American culture and geography. Giant photographs of the Grand Canyon, Monument Valley, Mount Rainier, the Golden Gate Bridge, the Chicago skyline, and other sites adorn her stair towers, and U.S. themes dominate the decor of many of the restaurants (see below). *America,* the ship—that is, the old United States Line's vessel SS *America*—is the motif of the SS *America* Library, which holds memorabilia and artifacts from the vessel as well as a scale model built specifically for the room. Despite her year-round Hawaiian itineraries, *America* actually employs relatively little Hawaiian imagery beyond some art, some carpeting and upholstery, and the small Hawaiian cultural display in the atrium. If you like, you can enjoy Hawaii's own Kona Beer on tap in the (hmmm . . .) Gold Rush Saloon, with its prospector decor. For a more elegant drinking experience, head to the Napa Wine Bar, whose decor of stone-pattern walls, box-shaped light fixtures, and light woods and upholsteries straddles the line between Napa Valley casual and hip 1950s lounge. In a nice touch, a door opens to outdoor seating on the Promenade Deck. Nearby, Pink's Champagne and Cigar Bar spans the width of the ship, with bright Hawaii-patterned carpeting and a contrastingly 19th-century-casino-style chandelier hovering above its piano-bar piano. Way up on Deck 13, the small, intimate, and beautifully designed Lanai Bar & Lounge is located next to one of the largest dedicated meeting spaces at sea, with auditoriums and facilities for up to 550 participants. For kids, the Rascal's Kids Club offers an elaborate indoor jungle gym, a movie room full of beanbag chairs, computer terminals, a large play space, and a protected outdoor splash pool with tube slide. Next door, the teen center is designed like an adult lounge, with a "bar," dance floor, and games.

Because of Hawaiian law, there's no casino or any other gambling on board. If you've got a jones, head to the card room, where you might find a secret game of Texas Hold 'Em in progress. The password is *swordfish.*

DINING OPTIONS *Pride of America*'s two main restaurants are the Skyline Restaurant, with its Art Deco decor and skyscraper motifs, and the mucho Americano Liberty Restaurant, with its greeting statues of George Washington and Abe Lincoln, stars-and-ribbons carpeting, soaring-eagle-motif glass ceiling and glass Mount Rushmore, and bunting-style curtains that give it the look of an old-time political rally. Passengers can also choose from several intimate, extra-cost options: the Lazy J Texas Steakhouse, where waiters serve in cowboy hats; Jefferson's Bistro, an elegant venue modeled after the president's home and serving French cuisine; the Little Italy Italian restaurant; and East Meets West, a Pan-Asian restaurant with attached sushi/sashimi bar and *teppanyaki* room. Alternative, reservations-only restaurants carry a charge of $10 to $20 per person. For late-night cravings, the Cadillac Diner serves burgers, shakes, and other diner fare 24 hours, with additional seating outside on the Promenade Deck. On Deck 11, the Aloha Cafe buffet is designed with multiple serving islands both inside and out.

Because of the ship's emphasis on port calls, restaurants tend to be busiest early, with long lines often forming right at 5:30pm. The later you dine, the less the wait and the better the service, as the staff won't be as rushed. ***Tip:*** It's easier to get reservations at alternative restaurants for the first couple of nights and on luau night in Maui, when most passengers stay ashore.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES *America*'s well-stocked ocean-view gym is open 24 hours a day, and the adjacent aerobics room has floor-to-ceiling windows and a great selection of stretching, step, and other traditional classes at no extra charge, plus spinning, kickboxing, and other trendy choices for $10 per class. Nearby, the spa and salon offer ocean views as well, plus the small outdoor Oasis Pool. *Pride of America*'s Pool Deck, her central outdoor space, is a bit underwhelming. Look to the deck above, however, for a couple of fun toys: a trampoline with bungee harness to keep you from flying over the side, and a "spaceball challenger" gyroscope in which passengers, suitably strapped in, can revolve 360 degrees in any direction, like astronauts in outer space.

A wraparound Promenade Deck offers a great stroll.

Norwegian Sky • Norwegian Sun

The Verdict

The older *Sun* and *Sky* have a cozier feel than NCL's bigger, newer ships, yet still feature multiple restaurants and lots of cabins with balconies.

Norwegian Sun *(photo: Matt Hannafin)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)		*Sun*	1,001/432
Sky	77,104	Crew	
Sun	78,509	*Sky*	1,000
Passengers (double occ.)		*Sun*	968
Sky	2,002	Passenger/Crew Ratio	2 to 1
Sun	1,936	Year Launched	
Passenger/Space Ratio		*Sky*	1999
Sky	38.5	*Sun*	2001
Sun	40.6	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins		*Sky*	2009
Sky	1,001/257	*Sun*	N/A

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	4.5
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4
Public Comfort/Space	4	Children's Facilities	3.5
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	4

Norwegian Sky and *Sun* were the first two megaships built for NCL's modern era, and blazed the trail that all the later ships followed, with multiple restaurants and everything designed with casual cruising in mind. *Sky* spent 4 years sailing as *Pride of Aloha* for NCL's Hawaii operation, but is now sailing Bahamas itineraries under her original name.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$53	118–191	yes	yes	yes	yes
Outside	$63	147–173	yes	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$197	264–570	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS *Sky*'s cabins are done up in fun, lively island colors, but they're quite small and offer limited closet and storage space—just a two-panel closet and a small bureau with four slim drawers—so be prepared to use your suitcase to store whatever. Oh, and watch out for those reading lamps above the beds: Their protruding shades make sitting up impossible. The ship's 240 balcony cabins and the vast majority of standard outside and inside cabins are almost 40 square feet smaller than standard cabins on NCL's newer ships. Bathrooms are also compact, with tubular shower stalls and slivers of shelving.

It's worth noting that *Sky*'s hull was originally built by Costa, who'd planned for the cabins to have portholes and no balconies. Costa sold the hull to NCL after the shipyard went bust, and, unwilling to bring out a megaship without balconies, NCL compromised, working around the existing portholes and adding balconies, resulting in an odd door-and-porthole combo (most ships have sliding-glass doors) between cabin and balcony.

Norwegian Sun is heavy on suites and minisuites, the latter of which measure a roomy 264 to 301 square feet (plus 68- to 86-sq.-ft. balconies) and have walk-in closets, sitting areas, and bathtubs. Twenty 355- to 570-square-foot Penthouse and Owner's suites (with 119- to 258-sq.-ft. balconies) include the services of a butler and concierge who will get you on the first tender to port, make dinner reservations, and generally try to please your every whim. The pair of penthouses also has a separate living room and dining area. Among the regular balcony cabins, categories BA, BB, and BC (which take up most of Decks 8–10) are laid out awkwardly, with the twin beds and the closet-dresser unit positioned too close together. A person dragging a suitcase has to twist up like a pretzel to squeeze by. Other than that, the decor is pleasant with caramel-wood veneers; attractive gilt-framed artwork; and navy, gold, and Kelly green fabrics and carpeting. Storage space is plentiful, so much so that on a recent cruise we couldn't even manage to fill up all the shelves. The bathrooms have a pair of shelves above the counter and a really useful one in the shower, though otherwise the skinny shower stalls can be a tight squeeze. Cabins at the forward end of Deck 6 have large portholes that look out on the ship's wraparound Promenade Deck (which is popular with walkers and runners, so you'll probably want to have your curtains closed most of the time). Every cabin has a small sitting area, a minifridge (not stocked), a hair dryer, TV, desk and chair, and a coffee/tea-maker.

Six cabins on *Sky* and 20 cabins aboard *Sun* are equipped for wheelchairs.

PUBLIC AREAS Even though *Norwegian Sky* is the older of these two vessels, her 2-month 2008 refurbishment made her decor much fresher and more fun, while *Sun* is still done up in a pleasing but not too jarring pastiche of mostly cool blues, sages, deep reds, and soft golds blended with marble, burled-wood veneers, and brass and chrome detailing.

Both ships are bright and sun-filled due to an abundance of floor-to-ceiling windows. Surrounding the understated three-level atrium on several levels are a bar, clusters of chairs creating relaxing pockets, and an area where a pianist performs. Each ship has nearly a dozen bars, including a sports bar, a wine bar, a nightclub/disco, two large poolside bars, a coffee bar, an Internet cafe, and a dark and cozy cigar club with the most comfortable, thick, buttery leather chairs and couches around. With soft ballads coming from the adjacent piano bar setting the background music, the cigar bar is the most appealing place on the ship for quiet conversation (unless, of course, you can't stand smoke). Many of the balcony seats in the two-story show lounge have obstructed views of the stage, and decor-wise, this isn't one of the ships' most impressive spaces. Still, the lights are low most of the time, and the focus is on the stage, where it should be. There's a large, attractive observation lounge wrapped in windows on one of the top two decks; at night it's a venue for live music. The casinos are large and flashy enough, though not as over the top as those you'll find on Carnival's and Royal Caribbean's ships. The layout of the shops is attractive, with a wide streetlike corridor cutting between the main boutiques and a long elegant jewelry counter.

For kids, the ships' huge children's area includes a sprawling playroom with ridiculously high ceilings, a teen center with a large movie screen and foosball games, and a video arcade. Each ship also has a wading pool.

DINING OPTIONS Like the rest of the NCL fleet, *Sun* and *Sky* excel in the restaurant department. For breakfast, lunch, and dinner, there are two elegant dining rooms with lots of tables for two and four. A large, well-organized indoor/outdoor

casual buffet restaurant serves all three meals, plus snacks (such as pizza and cookies) in between. For dinner you can also choose from eight alternative restaurants on *Sun* and three on *Sky.* Both have a Le Bistro, an elegant space with lots of windows and several comfy round booths mixed among the regular tables ($10 cover charge). Both ships also have a long, narrow restaurant that stretches between their two main restaurants. On *Sun* it's Il Adagio, an Italian eatery where Caesar salads are prepared from scratch tableside and the warm chocolate hazelnut cake is to die for ($10 cover charge). On *Sky* the space houses Cagney's, an elegant steakhouse. *Sky*'s version of Il Adagio is located on the Pool Deck, where it mixes healthy cuisine with gourmet pizza and low-cal desserts. *Sun* also offers a sushi bar, serving expertly prepared, fresh-tasting maki and California rolls ($15 cover); the adjacent *teppanyaki* venue, where a chef theatrically cuts and flings shrimp, chicken, beef, and other ingredients at center table ($20 cover); the East Meets West Steakhouse, where $20 per person will buy you some mighty slabs of meat; Pacific Heights, a health-oriented dinner venue (no charge); the Tex-Mex/tapas restaurant, serving an assortment of finger food (no charge) along with sangria and a selection of Mexican beer; and the Ginza Japanese Restaurant.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The well-stocked oceanview gyms on these ships are open 24 hours a day, and the adjacent aerobics room has floor-to-ceiling windows and a great selection of classes, from spinning to kickboxing. Nearby, the Balinese-inspired spa and salon offer ocean views as well. On *Sun,* while you wait to be led to your treatment room, you can relax in a serene sitting area that has a wall of glass facing the sea.

Out on deck, there's a pair of pools with a cluster of four hot tubs between them. One deck up you'll find a combo basketball/volleyball court, a pair of golf driving nets, and shuffleboard. On *Sun* the kids' wading pool and some cute mini-chaise longues are conveniently tucked along the starboard side of the Sports Deck (near a door to the interior of the ship); on *Sky* it's in a more desolate spot far forward on the Sports Deck, where there's also a fifth hot tub.

10 Oceania Cruises

8300 NW 33rd St., Ste. 308, Miami, FL 33122. ✆ **800/531-5619** or 305/514-2300. www.oceaniacruises.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL Oceania is the phoenix that rose from the ashes after Renaissance Cruises went belly up in September 2001. Headed by Renaissance's former co-CEO, the line owns three of Renaissance's ships and mimics some attributes of much pricier lines, with excellent service and cuisine and a quiet, refined onboard feel. **Sails to:** Caribbean (plus Europe, South America, Asia, Australia/New Zealand).

THE EXPERIENCE Oceania is positioned as an "upper premium" line intended to fill the gap—in terms of both ship size and level of luxury—between big-ship premium lines such as Celebrity and real luxe lines such as Regent Seven Seas. It goes for a kind of floating country club feel, with a low-key ambience, few organized activities, small-scale entertainment, a casually sporty dress code, an emphasis on cabin comfort, and long itineraries that favor smaller, less visited ports. Prices are higher than premium competitors Azamara, Celebrity, Holland America, and Princess, though they often include airfare to the port of embarkation.

Pros

- **Excellent cuisine:** In both the main dining room and specialty restaurants, Oceania is near the top among mainstream lines.
- **Excellent, personal service:** The ships' international crews are extremely friendly and eager to please.
- **Intimate size:** Oceania's ships carry only 684 passengers apiece, making for a much more human-scale feel than you get aboard a megaship.
- **Nonsmoking policy:** On these ships, smoking is permitted only in two small areas of the Pool Deck and nightclub. (Of course, this is a con for smokers.)

Cons

- **Few outside decks:** There's only a Pool Deck, a Sun Deck, and the deserted Promenade/Boat Deck, which is never used because it has no deck chairs or other furniture. Aside from the many private cabin balconies, you'd have a hard time finding a quiet little outdoor nook.
- **Few activities:** By design, Oceania generally leaves passengers to their own devices. This is a con only if you need constant stimulation.

OCEANIA: CLASS ACT, COZY SHIPS

Remember Renaissance Cruises? Founded in 1988, it made news in the '90s by building a large fleet of identical medium-size ships and going direct to consumers rather than working with travel agents. Both of these were fairly revolutionary moves back then, and, as often happens with revolutions, this one fizzled. Already in bad financial shape when 9/11 hit, the line was forced into bankruptcy during the resultant travel downturn. Left high and dry, its eight ships were put up for auction to the highest bidder. Oceania, founded by former Renaissance CEO Frank Del Rio, started up in 2003 with two of them (the former *R1* and *R2,* renamed *Regatta* and *Insignia*) and added a third, *Nautica,* in late 2005. The remaining Renaissance vessels are now owned by Princess (*Pacific Princess, Tahitian Princess,* and *Royal Princess*) and Azamara (*Azamara Journey* and *Azamara Quest*). In 2007, Oceania was effectively bought by Apollo Management, an investment group that also owns Regent Seven Seas Cruises and has a 50% stake in NCL. The infusion of cash allowed Oceania to plan two new 1,260-passenger, 65,000-ton ships, which will be built at Italy's Fincantiari shipyard and delivered to the line in 2010 and 2011 (see the box, "Preview: Oceania's *Marina,*" below).

Oceania's itineraries are world-ranging, with one ship generally positioned in the Caribbean for the winter (it's *Regatta* for 2010) and the others sailing to Europe, South America, Asia, and Australia/New Zealand.

Compared with the other mainstream lines, here's how Oceania rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor				✓	
Dining				✓	
Activities		✓			
Children's Program	N/A*				
Entertainment			✓		
Service				✓	
Worth the Money				✓	

** Oceania offers no children's program.*

Preview: Oceania's *Marina*

In late March 2007, Oceania announced plans to build a pair of 1,258-passenger, 65,000-ton vessels to be delivered in 2010 and 2011. Dubbed the Oceania class, a nod to the fact that they're the first new vessels built for the line (*Regatta, Insignia,* and *Nautica* all came from Renaissance Cruises), they're being built by Italian shipbuilder Fincantieri, with interiors by the architectural firm of Yran & Storbraaten, the company behind the decor of Royal Caribbean's *Voyager of the Seas,* Disney's *Magic* and *Wonder,* Silversea's *Silver Whisper* and *Silver Shadow,* and Regent's *Seven Seas Mariner* and *Seven Seas Navigator.*

Both inside and out, the new ships will be an extension of the line's current Regatta-class vessels, retaining the same boutique-hotel feel while adding new amenities and a little extra engine punch that will allow them to travel 20% faster (and thus, sail farther on each itinerary). Ninety-six percent of all staterooms will have private teak verandas, and guests will be able to dine at six open-seating restaurants, including a grand dining room and four specialty restaurants: a grill, an Italian trattoria, a French bistro, and a Pan-Asian restaurant. According to the line, the ships will also employ the most advanced systems and technologies for minimizing their environmental impact.

The first of the pair, dubbed *Marina,* will debut in September 2010, with a still-unnamed sister following in July 2011.

PASSENGER PROFILE

Due partially to the length of these cruises (mostly 10, 12, and 14 days, going up to 26) and partially to the low-key onboard atmosphere, Oceania tends to attract older passengers who prefer to entertain themselves, reading in the library and enjoying the destination-heavy itineraries. Most are Americans, with many from the West Coast and many returning, having sailed previously with Oceania or with Renaissance back in the old days. A sprinkling of younger couples usually find themselves on board as well, though children are rare enough to be surprising. Whatever their age, passengers tend to be drawn by the line's 100% casual dress code and ambience.

Because of Oceania's stringent **nonsmoking rules,** most passengers are nonsmokers. Aside from one corner of the Pool Deck and one corner of the Horizons nightclub, smoking is not permitted anywhere on board—even in your cabin or private balcony.

DINING

Oceania's dining experience is one of its strongest suits, with menus created by renowned chef Jacques Pepin (one-time personal chef to Charles de Gaulle and, more recently, one of America's best-known chefs and food writers). Passengers are able to choose among four different restaurants for dinner: the main Grand Dining Room, the Mediterranean-style Toscana restaurant, the Polo Grill steakhouse, and the Tapas on the Terrace casual outdoor option. All four venues work on an open-seating basis

Oceania Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Regatta	**Caribbean:** 10- & 12-night eastern, r/t Miami (Jan–Mar). **Panama Canal:** 16-night, Los Angeles to Miami (Feb). **Mexican Riviera:** 10-night, r/t Los Angeles (Feb).

(dine when you want, with whom you want), with meals usually served in a 3-hour window from 6:30 to 9:30pm.

TRADITIONAL The **Grand Dining Room,** the main restaurant aboard each ship, features French-inspired Continental cuisine in five courses, with a string quartet providing music at dinner. Appetizers might include grilled marinated prawns, frog-leg mousse, and crushed new potatoes with chives and Malossol caviar, while soups might be as traditional as beef oxtail consommé or as unusual as Moroccan harira chicken soup. There are always several salads and a pasta of the day, and entrees are elaborate, well-presented versions of the big faves (lobster tail butterfly, beef Wellington, steamed Alaskan king crab legs), plus some uncommon dishes: sautéed sea bream filet and pheasant breast ballotine stuffed with morel mushrooms. There's always a tasty **vegetarian option,** plus an alternative selection of basics: grilled sirloin, broiled chicken, salmon filet, and the like.

SPECIALTY As an alternative, passengers can make a reservation at the ships' specialty restaurants, the Italian **Toscana** or the **Polo Grill** steakhouse. Toscana is sinfully overwhelming, serving half a dozen antipasti and an equal number of pasta dishes, soups, salads, and main courses such as medallions of filet mignon topped with sautéed artichoke and smoked mozzarella; swordfish steak sautéed in garlic, parsley, Tuscan olives, capers, and orvieto wine; and braised double-cut lamb chops in a sun-dried tomato, olive, and roasted garlic sauce. Polo Grill serves chops, seafood, and cuts of slow-aged beef, with all the substantial trimmings: seafood appetizers, soups such as New England clam chowder and lobster bisque, straight-up salads such as Caesar and iceberg wedge with blue cheese and crumbled bacon, and side dishes such as a baked potato, wild mushroom ragout, and creamed spinach. Passengers can make reservations for either restaurant during breakfast or lunch hours at the Terrace Cafe. There's no extra charge, but there's an initial two-reservation limit to ensure that all guests get a chance. If you'd like to dine here more than twice, add your name to the waiting list and you'll be contacted if there's space (which there usually is).

CASUAL On the casual side, the **Terrace Cafe** is a standard cruise ship buffet serving a range of sides, salads, main courses, and desserts. An attached pizzeria serves very tasty thin-crust pies. At lunch the Pool Deck's grill is also fired up, serving burgers, hot dogs, and specialty sandwiches. In the evening, the outdoor portion of the Terrace is transformed into **Tapas on the Terrace,** a romantic option with regional Spanish and Mediterranean specialties, other ethnic dishes, and home-style favorites served from a buffet. Waiters are on hand to serve drinks and generally be charming.

SNACKS & EXTRAS **High tea** is served daily at 4pm in the Horizons Lounge, with a good spread of pastries, tea sandwiches, and scones. **Room service** is available 24 hours. Guests in Owners, Vista, and Penthouse suites can have full meals served course by course in their rooms.

ACTIVITIES

By design, activities are not a high priority for Oceania. Expect **enrichment lectures** themed around the region being visited, fitness and computer classes, informal health and beauty seminars by the spa and salon staff, and a handful of old cruise standards such as bingo and shuffleboard. For people who are self-motivated and/or prefer to spend their time aboard reading on deck or in one of the library's overstuffed leather armchairs, the sparse activities schedule is ideal. If you like a lot of organized activities, though, this is not the line for you.

All of Oceania's ships have smallish, 19th-century-style casinos that see a fair amount of action. Internet access is available in Deck 9's Oceania@Sea Internet center and at two terminals in the library. The ships' full-service spas are run by Mandara, a subsidiary of Steiner Leisure, which operates almost every spa at sea.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

There are no special facilities on these ships, and the line typically carries very few children.

ENTERTAINMENT

The good news: You won't be assailed by steel-drum bands doing bad Bob Marley covers. Instead, you'll get a 12-piece jazz band on deck in the afternoon and in the club at night; pianists performing Cole Porter, Hoagy Carmichael, and other standards at the martini bar before dinner; and an occasional string quartet.

The bad news: That's the high point of the onboard entertainment. Each night, the main show lounge presents a comedian, solo musician, folkloric act, or other headliner, but the shows don't have the breadth you'll find on larger vessels. Of course, there also aren't any big, bad Vegas-style song-and-dance revues, and for that we whisper a prayer of thanks.

Other entertainment options include the occasional karaoke session or a movie presented out on deck.

SERVICE

The staff in the restaurants are crack troops, delivering each course promptly but without any sense that they're hurrying passengers through their meals. Service balances precision with friendliness, skewing close to the kind of understated professionalism you see on the real luxury lines. The relatively small number of passengers aboard also means service is more personal than you find aboard the megaships. In the bars, staff tend to remember your drink order by the second day, and cabin stewardesses greet their passengers by name in the corridors. Like many other lines, Oceania adds an **automatic gratuity** to your shipboard account ($12.50 per person, per day, which may be adjusted up or down at your discretion). For guests occupying Owner's, Vista, and Penthouse suites, there's an additional $3.50-per-day gratuity added for butler service.

There's a **self-service laundry** and ironing room on Deck 7, in addition to standard laundry, dry cleaning, and pressing service offered by the ship's laundry.

Regatta

The Verdict

With her smallish size, understated decor, and serene atmosphere, this mostly nonsmoking ship is more like a quiet boutique hotel than a cruise vessel, providing a comfortable, laid-back, yet stylish way to experience the Caribbean.

Regatta *(photo: Oceania)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	30,200	Crew	400
Passengers (double occ.)	684	Passenger/Crew Ratio	1.7 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio	44.2	Year Launched	1998
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	343/232	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	2005

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	4
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4
Public Comfort/Space	4.5	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	4

Imagine a cozy, classically styled boutique hotel in the shape of a cruise ship and you've pretty much got the idea. Like all of the former Renaissance vessels, *Regatta* is comfortable and spacious, decorated mostly in warm, dark woods and rich fabrics. She's traditional and sedate, with an emphasis on intimate spaces rather than the kind of grand, splashy ones you'll find on most megaships. Of course, her small size means there'd be no *room* for grand spaces, even if they'd been wanted: Carrying only 684 passengers, *Regatta*'s intimacy is one of her main selling points. The atmosphere is relaxed and clubby, with no formal nights that demand tuxedos and gowns.

Regatta has two identical sister ships, *Insignia* and *Nautica,* which sail in Europe, South America, Asia, and Australia/New Zealand.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$149	160	no	yes	yes	yes
Outside	$250	160–216*	no	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$450	322–962*	yes	yes	yes	yes

** Including veranda*

CABINS Staterooms aboard *Regatta* are straightforward, no-nonsense spaces with a hint of European city hotel: plain off-white walls, dark-wood trim and furniture, and rich carpeting. The highlight of each, though, is its Tranquility Bed, an oasis of 350-thread-count Egyptian cotton sheets and duvet covers, down duvets and pillows, custom-designed extrathick mattresses, and a mound of throw pillows to prop you up during the late-late show. Spacious balconies have teak decking for a classic nautical look, and all cabins have televisions, safes, vanities with mirrors, hair dryers, phones,

and full-length mirrors. Closet space is a little skimpy considering the lengthy itineraries these ships sail, but drawer space scattered around the cabin, and space under the beds, make up for this a bit. Overall cabin size is in the 165-square-foot range—not tiny, but not exceptionally large, either. There are also some bizarre little quirks. Light switches, for instance, can be mystifying: There doesn't seem to be any way to turn off the bedside lights until you discover the tiny, almost hidden buttons up near their shades. There are also switches for the overheads right in the headboard, which makes it very easy to switch them on accidentally in your sleep.

Suites include minibars, bathtubs, and a small area with a cocktail table for intimate in-room dining. Ten Owner's Suites measure 786 to 982 square feet and are located at the ship's bow and stern, featuring wraparound balconies, queen-size beds, whirlpool bathtubs, minibars, living rooms, and guest bathrooms. Owners Suites, Vista Suites, and Penthouse Suites feature butler service. Concierge-class staterooms (in between regular cabins and suites) add some warm-and-fuzzy to the amenities, including a welcome bottle of champagne, complimentary shoeshine service, and a DVD player; priority embarkation, check-in, luggage delivery, and restaurant reservations; and additional bathroom amenities, such as massaging shower heads and luxury toiletries.

Three cabins are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS Overall, *Regatta* presents an elegant yet homey appearance, with dark-wood paneling, fluted columns, ornate faux-iron railings, gilt-framed classical paintings, Oriental-style carpets, frilly moldings, marble and brass accents, and deep-hued upholstery, all contributing to a kind of "English inn at sea" look. In the bow, the spacious, woodsy Horizons lounge has floor-to-ceiling windows and brass telescopes on three sides. It's used for dancing in the evenings and for various activities during the day. The 345-seat show lounge offers cabaret and variety acts, musical recitals, magic shows, and comedy, and the smallish but comfortable casino offers blackjack, poker tables, roulette, and slots. The attached Martini Bar has a ridiculously long martini list (some 30 recipes and an equal number of vodka choices) and is a very relaxing space in the pre-dinner hours, when a pianist plays standards. A jazz band performs here in the evenings.

Another notable space is the comfortable library, decorated in a traditional English style with warm red upholstery, mahogany paneling, a *trompe l'oeil* garden "skylight," and marble faux fireplace.

DINING OPTIONS The main dining room is an elegant single-level space surrounded on three sides by windows. It's spacious and understated, with simple wood-veneer wall panels, wall sconces, and teal carpeting. Tables seating between two and eight are available, though the smaller arrangements go fast. Just outside the maitre d' station is a cozy bar area where you can have a pre-dinner cocktail while waiting for your dinner companions. The ship's two specialty restaurants, the Polo Grill and Toscana, are both located in the stern on Deck 10, and are decorated to match their cuisine: woodsy, old-Hollywood decor in Polo and a bright white Mediterranean feel with Roman urns and reliefs in Toscana. The restaurants serve 96 and 90 guests, respectively. On Deck 9, the Terrace serves buffet breakfast, lunch, and dinner, the latter out under the stars, with drink service, Spanish cuisine, and candles flickering in lovely hurricane lamps. It's a very romantic spot if you can time your meal to the sunset.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The attractive teak Pool Deck, dotted with canvas umbrellas, offers a pair of hot tubs plus a slew of deck chairs and large daybeds for sunbathing. The Patio, a shaded outdoor lounge located in the aft

port corner of the Pool Deck, is furnished with thickly cushioned sofas, chairs, and daybeds. Drapes and general ambience add a hint of partition from the pool goings-on (not to mention shade), but you still feel like you're in the action. For more privacy, passengers can rent one of eight private cabanas on Deck 11, each with privacy partitions and white drapes that can be drawn or left open, plus great sea views, a retractable shade roof, and a plush daybed built for two. They're available either daily ($50 on port days, $100 on sea days) or for the entirety of your cruise, and come with the services of an attendant who provides food and beverage service, chilled towels, and water spritzes. Guests can also arrange to get massages and other spa treatments in their cabanas.

A small jogging track wraps around the deck immediately above the Pool Deck, while the fully equipped spa on Deck 9 offers a variety of treatments, including aromatherapy massages, hot-stone treatments, and various wraps and facials. Just forward of the spa there's an outdoor hydrotherapy whirlpool overlooking the bow. A decent-size oceanview gym and salon are attached.

11 Princess Cruises

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THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL With a fleet of mostly large and extralarge megaships, L.A.-based Princess offers a quality mainstream cruise experience with a nice balance of tradition and innovation, relaxation and excitement, casualness and glamour. **Sails to:** Caribbean, Alaska, Mexican Riviera, Hawaii, Canada/New England, Panama Canal (plus Europe, Asia, Australia/New Zealand, South America, the South Pacific, transatlantic).

THE EXPERIENCE If you were to put Celebrity, Holland America, and Royal Caribbean in a blender and mix them together, then add a pinch of both British maritime tradition and California style, you'd come up with Princess. Dining, entertainment, and activities are geared to a wide cross section of cruisers: The more traditional minded can spend some time in the library, join a bridge tournament, enjoy a formal dinner in a grand dining room, and then take in a show. Those seeking something different can paint their own pottery, then dine in an intimate Italian or steakhouse restaurant and take in a set of small-group jazz afterward. The line's largest vessels are some of the biggest at sea, yet still manage to offer intimate spaces for quiet times.

Pros

- **Lots of dining choices and flexibility:** Each ship offers multiple main dining rooms plus an intimate alternative restaurant or two and a 24-hour buffet. The line's Personal Choice program allows you to dine at a fixed time and place or wing it as you go along.
- **Excellent lounge entertainment:** Princess books top-quality entertainers for its piano lounges and smaller showrooms.

Cons

- **Pottery Barn decor:** More of a qualifier than a con: Princess's ships are very pleasant, yes, but the sea of beiges and blues is so safe that it can be a bit of a yawn. Artwork in public areas and staterooms tends toward bland.
- **Small gyms:** For such large vessels, the gyms are surprisingly small and can even feel cramped.

Compared with the other mainstream lines, here's how Princess rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor				✓	
Dining				✓	
Activities				✓	
Children's Program				✓	
Entertainment				✓	
Service				✓	
Worth the Money				✓	

PRINCESS: SMART CASUAL

The Princess story goes back to 1962, when company founder Stanley McDonald chartered a vessel called the *Yarmouth* for use as a floating hotel at the Seattle World's Fair. In 1965, he officially started Princess Cruises, naming the company after another chartered vessel, the *Princess Patricia,* which offered cruises between Los Angeles, Alaska, and Mexico's Pacific coast. In 1974, Princess was snapped up by British shipping giant P&O, and later that decade got a big boost by having its ships featured on the TV series *The Love Boat.* To this day, Gavin "Captain Stubing" MacLeod acts as occasional pitchman for the line, though the original *Pacific Princess* and *Island Princess,* the twin 640-passenger vessels used in the series, finally left the fleet in 1999 and 2002. (Their names have since been assigned to new vessels.) In 2003, P&O/Princess was purchased by Carnival Corporation, the 500-pound gorilla of the cruise world.

Although its ships sail to nearly every destination covered in this book, Princess is particularly strong in **Alaska,** where it offers more than 20 different cruisetour itineraries in conjunction with its Gulf of Alaska and Inside Passage voyages, visiting Denali National Park, Fairbanks, the Kenai Peninsula, Wrangell–St. Elias National Park, Canada's Yukon Territory, and distant Prudhoe Bay on Alaska's north coast. Guests on these land tours stay in five Princess-owned wilderness lodges and travel via motorcoach and the line's domed train cars.

PASSENGER PROFILE

The majority of Princess's guests are in their 40s, 50s, 60s, and older, though more and more 30-somethings (and their families) are sailing these days, particularly during summer school holidays. Overall, Princess passengers are less boisterous than those aboard Carnival and not quite as staid as those aboard Holland America. Its ships all have extensive kids' facilities and activities, making them suitable for families, while their balance of formal and informal makes them a good bet for a romantic vacation, too, with opportunities for doing your own thing mixed in among more traditional cruise experiences.

DINING

Princess has done a superb job in upgrading the quality of all its food offerings in recent years, whether it be the main restaurants, the alternative restaurants, or the buffets. Only the pizza hasn't been upgraded, but that's because it's always been terrific.

TRADITIONAL Princess's Personal Choice Dining program allows guests two options: dining at a set time with set dining companions in one of the ship's two or

Still the Love Boat

Ever the romantic, Princess has things covered from proposal through "I do." On *Crown, Emerald, Caribbean, Grand, Sea, Star,* and *Ruby Princess,* prospective fiancés can propose to their future mates via video on the ship's giant movie screens. Called **Engagement Under the Stars,** the $695 package includes the creation of a personalized proposal video with the ship's videographer as well as champagne and chocolates, an engagement portrait session, candid photos of the proposal, an in-cabin breakfast, dinner for two at one of the ship's specialty restaurants, a couple's massage in the Lotus Spa, and other extras. Meanwhile, *Coral, Island, Diamond,* and *Sapphire Princess,* as well as the Grand-class ships, are all outfitted with **wedding chapels.** *Grand* was the first cruise ship to have one, and now a string of other ships have followed suit. Princess was also the first modern line to offer weddings at sea performed by the captain, though now Celebrity and Azamara offer that option as well.

Romantics sailing aboard any Princess ship can have **dinner under the stars** served by a dedicated waiter on their private balcony, at a table set with a tablecloth, hurricane candle lamp, and champagne. While the waiter is setting everything up, you and your significant other can have a complimentary cocktail in one of the ship's bars. The whole thing costs $50 per person. You can also order breakfast served on the balcony for $25 per couple.

three main restaurants, or just showing up anytime during a 4½-hour window and being seated by the maitre d'. If you're not sure which option you'll prefer once you're on board, sign up for traditional, as it's easier to switch to anytime dining than it is to go the other way around. Passengers choosing the flexible option but wishing to be served by the same waiter nightly can usually be seated in his or her section if they make a special request.

Whether you choose traditional or flexible dining, your menu in the main dining room will be the same, offering several appetizers, soup and salad, freshly made pastas, and a choice of five to eight dinner entrees that may include slow-roasted prime rib, surf and turf, rack of lamb with Dijon sauce, port wine-glazed pork, halibut in creamy dill sauce, filet mignon with Madeira-truffle demi-glace, and duck a l'orange. There are always **healthy choices** and **vegetarian options,** too, plus staples such as broiled Atlantic salmon, grilled chicken, and grilled New York sirloin steak.

Unlike the "no dress code" dress code that's part of NCL's Freestyle dining plan, Princess maintains the tradition of holding 2 formal nights per week, with the other nights designated smart casual, which is defined as "an open-neck shirt and slacks for gentlemen and a dress, skirt and blouse, or trouser suit outfit for ladies." Men, however, should take our advice and pack at least a jacket. Otherwise, you may be down in the gift shop buying one after you realize everyone on the ship except you decided to dress for dinner. We speak from experience on this one.

All of the restaurants offer a **kids' menu,** which includes goodies such as burgers, hot dogs, fish sticks, chicken fingers, and, of course, PB&J sandwiches; this menu is also offered in the Horizon Court during its sit-down bistro hours 11pm to 4am nightly.

For foodies, the line offers a **Chef's Table** experience that starts with cocktails and hors d'oeuvres in the ship's galley, where the executive chef previews the menu he's created for that evening. From there, participants move to a dedicated table in the dining room for a special multicourse tasting dinner with wine pairings. During dessert, the chef rejoins the group for a discussion of the evening's meal. The experience costs $75 per person and is available on all the line's megaships.

SPECIALTY All Princess ships that sail from the U.S. feature alternative restaurants: an Italian trattoria and steakhouse on the Grand- and Diamond-class ships, trattoria and New Orleans–style restaurants on *Coral* and *Island Princess,* and a steakhouse and free sit-down pizzeria on the Sun-class ships.

Sabatini's Trattoria ($20 per person) is a traditional Italian restaurant with an airy decor, an open kitchen, balloon-back chairs, and Italian scenes in faux tilework. Dinners here are eight-course extravaganzas emphasizing seafood, with most dishes brought automatically—you just select your main course.

The **Sterling Steakhouse** ($15 per person) offers a dark and woodsy ambience. Guests can choose their favorite cut of beef—rib-eye, New York strip, porterhouse, and filet mignon—and have it cooked to order, with starters such as chili, blooming onion, jalapeño poppers, and fresh Caesar salad, plus the usual sides of baked potato or fries, sautéed mushrooms, creamed spinach, and corn on the cob.

Crown, Caribbean, Golden, Emerald, and *Ruby Princess* also offer the **Crown Grill** steak and seafood restaurant ($25 per person).

Reservations are recommended for all alternative restaurants as seating is limited. See the individual ship reviews below for more details.

CASUAL Fleetwide, passengers can choose casual dining at breakfast, lunch, and dinner in the 24-hour, buffet-style Horizon Court restaurant. At breakfast, you'll find the usual: fresh fruit, cold cuts, cereal, steam-table scrambled eggs, cooked-to-order fried eggs, a waffle station, meats, and fish. At lunch, you'll find several salads, fruits, hot and cold dishes, roasts, vegetarian choices, and sometimes sushi. Evenings (until 10pm), the space serves a casual buffet dinner that usually has many of the same dishes as in the main dining room. From 11pm to 4am every night it serves a late-night menu of pastas, seafood, poultry, and red meats, along with a chef's special of the day. The atmosphere is strictly casual. *Crown, Emerald, Caribbean, Star, Golden,* and *Ruby Princess* offer two casual dining venues in the piazza-style atrium: an International Café serving a rotating menu throughout the day, and a wine, cheese, and seafood bar (a la carte pricing at both).

Getting Off on Princess

Fleetwide, Princess now offers a program it calls **Silent Disembarkation.** Rather than wait around for their color-code to be called, as on most other lines, Princess guests now receive a note the night before telling them the exact time they'll be debarking, and in which public room they should wait. When the time comes, a member of the ship's staff escorts them to the gangway. Simple, efficient, and guess what? It works. Princess gets major kudos for finding a way around one of cruise travel's more annoying processes.

SNACKS & EXTRAS Poolside grills serve burgers, hot dogs, and pizza; a patisserie offers coffee and pastries; and an ice-cream bar serves Princess's house brand for a charge. There's also 24-hour room service available in the staterooms. Guests will also find crewmembers passing out fresh-baked cookies and milk in the afternoons on deck and in the atrium.

ACTIVITIES

Like the other big mainstream lines, Princess offers onboard activities designed to appeal to a wide range of ages and tastes. For active types, all the ships offer traditional shipboard sports such as Ping-Pong and shuffleboard; more athletic activities such as aerobics classes and water volleyball; and virtual-reality golf simulators. The Grand-, Coral-, and Diamond-class ships all offer basketball/volleyball courts and 9-hole miniature-golf courses, and the latter are also available on the Sun-class ships.

For something more cerebral, the line's **ScholarShip@Sea** enrichment program (one of the very best activity programs at sea) offers classes in cooking, computer skills (such as basic Web design, Photoshop, and Excel), finance, photography, scrapbooking, and even ceramics. Large-group seminars are free, while small-group and individual classes carry a charge of around $20 to $25 per person. Charges for paint-your-own ceramics are calculated based on the piece you create.

In 2008, Princess rolled out a new program called the **Ultimate Ship Tour.** For $150 per person, a small group of guests gets a truly behind-the-scenes look at how a ship operates by going to the engine control room, the laundry room, the galley, the bridge, and more. Along the way, they get to meet various crewmembers and get a series of exclusive gifts.

Sit-down activities include bingo, cards, trivia games, dance lessons, and recent-release **big-screen movies** (shown on giant outdoor LCD screens on *Caribbean, Crown, Emerald, Ruby, Grand, Golden, Star, Coral, Sea,* and *Dawn Princess,* and soon to be installed aboard *Sun Princess* (April 2010), *Island Princess* (October 2010), *Diamond Princess* (November 2010), and *Sapphire Princess* (2011)—that is, aboard the entire Princess fleet with the exception of its three midsize, 700-passenger ships, *Royal, Pacific,* and *Ocean Princess.* A related program, the **Leonard Maltin Movie Club,** presents films specially chosen by (and with a special video introduction by) the noted film critic and historian. Showings take place at the "Movies Under the Stars" venue or in the theater, and are followed by an hour-long group discussion hosted by the cruise staff. The "Leonard Maltin Movie Channel" is another option, showing specially chosen films on your stateroom TV.

Activities designed to part you from your cash include art auctions and beauty and spa demonstrations. Others designed to part you from your dignity include belly-flop contests, the perennial Newlywed/Not-so-Newlywed game, an *American Idol*–style Princess Pop Star competition, and a reality-TV style makeover show called *If They Could Sea Me Now.* In Alaska, rangers, naturalists, and guest lecturers present talks and slide shows on such topics as the Iditarod sled-dog race, the wildlife and ecology of Glacier Bay and the Tongass National Forest, oceanography and marine life, glaciers, Native Alaskan cultures, and Alaskan history.

All Princess ships offer well-stocked libraries, 24-hour Internet centers (moderate prices, slow service), and wireless Internet hot zones for laptop users (wireless cards are available if you don't have one). In-stateroom Wi-Fi and cellphone service is also currently rolling out fleetwide.

Princess Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Caribbean	**Caribbean:** 7- & 14-night southern, r/t San Juan (Jan–Apr & Oct–Dec). 9-night eastern, r/t New York (May–July). **Bermuda:** 7-night, San Juan to New York (May), New York to San Juan (Oct). **Canada/New England:** 7-night, r/t New York (Aug–Oct).
Coral	**Panama Canal:** 15-night, east- & westbound between Los Angeles & Fort Lauderdale (Jan–Apr & Dec). 19-night Fort Lauderdale to Vancouver (Apr). 18-night Vancouver to Fort Lauderdale (Sept). 10-night, west- & eastbound between Fort Lauderdale and Acapulco (Oct). 10-night, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Oct–Dec). **U.S. West Coast & British Columbia:** 4-night, Los Angeles to Vancouver (May). 5-night, r/t Vancouver (May). 3-night, Vancouver to Los Angeles (Sept). **Alaska:** 7-night Gulf of Alaska, north- & southbound between Vancouver & Whittier/Anchorage (May–Sept).
Crown	**Caribbean:** 7-night western (Jan–Apr & Oct–Dec), 5-night eastern (Dec), 9-night southern (Dec), all r/t Fort Lauderdale. **Canada/New England:** 10-night, north- & southbound between New York & Québec City (Sept–Oct). **Atlantic Coast:** 13-night, Québec City to Fort Lauderdale (Oct).
Diamond	**Alaska:** 7-night Gulf of Alaska, north- & southbound between Vancouver & Whittier/Anchorage (May–Sept).
Emerald	**Caribbean:** 7-night eastern (Jan–Sept), 7-night western (May–Sept), 14-night eastern/western (May–Sept), 10-night southern (Sept–Dec), 10-night eastern (Sept–Dec), 20-night southern (Sept–Dec) & 20-night eastern (Sept–Dec), all r/t Fort Lauderdale.
Golden	**Hawaii:** 14-night, r/t Los Angeles (Jan–Apr & Sept–Dec). **U.S. West Coast & British Columbia:** 1-night, Vancouver to Seattle (May), Seattle to Vancouver (Sept). 5-night, Los Angeles to Vancouver (May). 3-night, Vancouver to Los Angeles (Sept). **Alaska:** 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Seattle (May–Sept).
Grand	**Caribbean:** 11-night southern (Jan) & 14-night (Jan–Mar & Oct–Dec), both r/t Fort Lauderdale.
Island	**Panama Canal:** 10-night, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Jan–Apr & Dec), Fort Lauderdale to Acapulco (Feb–Mar), Acapulco to Fort Lauderdale (Jan–Mar). 15- or 18-night Fort Lauderdale to Los Angeles or Vancouver (Apr). 17- or 15-night, Vancouver or San Francisco to Fort Lauderdale (Oct). 15-night Los Angeles to Fort Lauderdale (Nov–Dec). **U.S. West Coast & British Columbia:** 3-night, Los Angeles to Vancouver (May). 2-night, Vancouver to San Francisco (Oct). **Alaska:** 7-night north- & southbound between Vancouver & Whittier/Anchorage (May–Sept).
Royal	**Caribbean:** 14-night, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Mar–Apr). 6-night eastern (Apr). **Panama Canal:** 20-night, Fort Lauderdale to Seattle (Apr). **U.S. West Coast & British Columbia:** 4-night, San Francisco to Vancouver (May). 1-night, Seattle to Vancouver (Sept). **Alaska:** 14-night, r/t Seattle (May–Aug). **Hawaii:** 10-night, Vancouver to Honolulu (Sept).
Ruby	**Caribbean:** 10-night southern (Jan–Apr), 10-night eastern (Jan–Mar) & 7-night eastern (Oct–Dec), all r/t Fort Lauderdale.
Sapphire	**Mexican Riviera:** 7-night (Jan–May & Nov–Dec) & 4-night (Dec), r/t Los Angeles. **U.S. West Coast & British Columbia:** 7-night, Los Angeles to Vancouver (May). 1-night, Vancouver to Seattle (May), Seattle to Vancouver (Sept). 2-night, Vancouver to San Francisco (Sept). **Alaska:** 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Seattle (May–Sept).

Ship	Itineraries
Sea	**Caribbean:** 14-night, r/t Barbados or Montego Bay, Jamaica (Jan–Apr & Nov–Dec). 6-night, Barbados to Fort Lauderdale (May). 7-night, Fort Lauderdale to Barbados (Oct). **Panama Canal:** 21-night, Barbados to San Francisco (May). 15-night San Francisco to Fort Lauderdale (May). 23-night, San Francisco to Barbados (Oct). 16-night, San Francisco to Fort Lauderdale (Oct). **Alaska:** 10-night Inside Passage, r/t San Francisco (May–Sept). **Mexican Riviera:** 10-night, r/t San Francisco (Sept).
Star	**Caribbean:** 7-night eastern, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Apr).

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

Princess offers great facilities and amenities for kids and their parents, but it's not a line that's completely gung-ho about *only* catering to families—and therein lies a big advantage: Princess ships aren't overrun with children, typically carrying 20% to 50% fewer than you'll often see on the biggest Carnival, NCL, and Royal Caribbean ships, and way less than Disney.

Princess's Princess Kids program offers activities year-round for three age groups: **Princess Pelicans** (ages 3–7), **Shockwaves** (8–12), and **Remix** (13–17), supervised by a counseling staff whose size varies depending upon the number of children aboard. Each ship has a spacious indoor/outdoor **children's playroom** with a splash pool, an arts-and-crafts corner, game tables, and computers or game consoles, plus a **teen center** with computers, video games, a dance floor, and a music system. The two-story playrooms on *Golden* and *Grand* have a large fenced-in outside deck dedicated to kids only and featuring a teen section with a hot tub and private sunbathing area. The rest of the Grand-class ships have a great fenced-in outdoor play space for toddlers, and the *Coral, Island, Diamond,* and *Sapphire Princess* have a small swimming pool for adults adjacent to the outdoor Kids' Deck, allowing parents to relax while their kids play.

Traditional kids' activities include arts and crafts, scavenger hunts, game tournaments, spelling bees, movies and videos, coloring contests, pizza and ice-cream parties, karaoke, dancing, tours of the galley or behind the scenes at the theater, hula parties (complete with grass skirts!), and teen versions of *The Dating Game.*

Learning activities may include **environmental education programs** developed by the California Science Center that teach about oceans and marine life through printed materials and specially created films. The kids' equivalent of an onboard guest lecturer program is also offered occasionally, allowing children to go stargazing with an astronomer, learn drawing skills from an animator, and so on.

Children must be at least 6 months of age to sail. When kids are registered in the youth program, their parents are given pagers so that they can be contacted if their children need them. Parents may also rent walkie-talkies through the purser's desk if they want two-way communication with their kids. Two **parent "date nights"** let adults have a calm evening while kids dine with counselors in a separate restaurant. Teens have their own group night in one of the main dining rooms, complete with photographs and an after-dinner show. Younger kids can then be taken straight to

group babysitting in the children's center (available nightly 10pm–1am for kids 3–12; $5 per hour, per child). Princess does not offer private in-cabin babysitting.

On days in port, Princess offers children's center activities straight through from 8am to 5pm (on sea days the center closes for lunch), allowing parents to explore the port while their kids do their own thing. On Princess's private Bahamas beach, Princess Cays, kids can be checked in at a play area supervised by the shipboard youth staff (for details on Princess Cays see "The Cruise Lines' Private Islands" in chapter 10). In Alaska, kids ages 6 to 12 and teens ages 13 to 17 can participate in the **Junior Ranger and Teen Explorer program,** a joint effort between Princess and the National Parks Service that uses interactive projects to teach kids about Glacier Bay's natural and cultural history.

ENTERTAINMENT

Princess has some of the best entertainment at sea, with variety acts on the ships' main stages ranging from Vegas-style song-and-dance revues and cabaret singers to ventriloquists, acrobats, aerialists, stand-up comics, and musical soloists. The Sun-class ships offer entertainment in two showrooms, while the Grand-, Diamond-, and Coral-class vessels offer three shows nightly in their main theater and two smaller venues, plus quieter music in a few lounges, including the popular piano bars. At several other venues, including the Wheelhouse Bar and the atrium, you'll find pianists, guitarists, or string quartets providing live background music, and out by the pool a deck band plays at various times during the day. For those who would rather participate, there are regular karaoke nights and a **passenger talent show.** The ships' **casinos** are among the most comfortable at sea, very large and well laid out.

SERVICE

Overall, service is efficient and passengers rarely have to wait in lines, even in the busy Horizon Court buffet restaurants. As is true generally of staff aboard all the mainstream lines, you can expect them to be friendly, efficient, and happy to help. Cabin steward service is the most consistent, with dining service only slightly behind. Suite guests get extra service goodies, including complimentary Internet access, dry cleaning, laundry, and shoe polishing; complimentary corsage and boutonniere on formal nights; en suite afternoon tea; expedited embarkation and debarkation; and other perks.

Through the line's **Captain's Circle loyalty program,** cruisers who have sailed with Princess before are issued specially colored onboard keycards and door nameplates (gold after taking 1 to 5 cruises, platinum after 5 cruises or 50 cruise days, and elite after 15 cruises or 150 cruise days) so that staffers will know to be extra helpful. Platinum Captain's Circle members also get expedited embarkation and credit toward free Internet access, while Elite members receive free laundry and dry-cleaning services, a complimentary wine-tasting class, 10% off in the onboard gift shops, and more.

Gratuities for all service personnel are automatically added to all guest shipboard accounts at the rate of $10.50 per day, or $11 per person per day for guests occupying suites and mini-suites. You can make adjustments (up or down) by visiting or calling the purser's desk at any time. Passengers who wish to tip more traditionally—dispensing cash in person—can also make arrangements for this through the desk.

All of the Princess vessels offer laundry services, and also have **self-service laundromats.**

The Grand Class: Grand • Golden • Star • Caribbean • Crown • Emerald • Ruby Princess

The Verdict

These huge, well-accoutered vessels are very easy to navigate, never feel as crowded as you'd expect, and are amazingly intimate for their size.

Grand Princess *(photo: Princess Cruises)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)		*Caribbean/Crown/Emerald/Ruby*	1,200
Grand/Golden/Star	109,000	Passenger/Crew Ratio	
Caribbean/Crown/Emerald/Ruby	113,000	*Grand/Golden/Star*	2.4 to 1
Passengers (double occ.)		*Caribbean/Crown/Emerald/Ruby*	2.6 to 1
Grand/Golden/Star	2,600	Year Launched	
Caribbean	3,100	*Grand*	1998
Crown/Emerald/Ruby	3,070	*Golden*	2001
Passenger/Space Ratio		*Star*	2002
Grand/Golden/Star	41.9	*Caribbean*	2004
Caribbean/Crown/Emerald/Ruby	36.8	*Crown*	2006
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins		*Emerald*	2007
Grand/Golden/Star	1,300/710	*Ruby*	2008
Caribbean	1,557/881	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Crown/Emerald/Ruby	1,538/1,102	*Grand/Star*	2008
Crew		*Golden/Caribbean*	2009
Grand/Golden/Star	1,100	*Crown/Emerald/Ruby*	N/A

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

★★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	5	Dining Options	4.5
Appearance & Upkeep	4.5	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4.5
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	4
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	4.5

Princess's signature vessels, the Grand-class ships, were so ahead of their time when they debuted in 1998 (when *Grand Princess* was briefly the largest cruise ship in the world) that the design of even recent sisters such as *Crown* and *Emerald Princess* isn't significantly changed. They look like nothing else at sea, with their 18 decks soaring up to space-age discos hovering at their very stern, stretching from port to starboard. Though the vessels give an impression of immensity from the outside, inside they're extremely well laid out, very easy to navigate, and surprisingly cozy. In fact, their public areas never feel as crowded as you'd think they would with almost 4,000 people aboard, including guests and crew. The cozy carries over to public rooms like the clubby and dimly lit Explorer's Lounge and Wheelhouse Bar, whose traditional

accents recall a grander era of sea travel. In the elegant three-story atriums, classical string quartets perform on formal nights and during embarkation.

Caribbean Princess, Crown Princess, Emerald Princess, and *Ruby Princess* are slightly larger versions of the original Grand-class concept, with a similar layout but one extra deck, plus a cafe serving Caribbean dishes, an international cafe, a wine and seafood bar, a "piazza-style" atrium with a street-cafe vibe, and a steak and seafood restaurant. *Ruby Princess,* which debuted in November 2008, added some newness to the onboard experience: a British pub at lunch on sea days (no charge), a range of cheeses to go with the wine and seafood snacks available in Vines, and the Ultimate Ship tour, a truly behind-the-scenes look at how a ship operates.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$89	160	yes	yes	no	yes
Outside	$99	165–232	yes	yes	no	yes
Suite	$200	323–1,314*	yes	yes	yes	yes

** Includes veranda*

CABINS Though staterooms on these vessels are divided into some 35 categories, there are actually fewer than 10 configurations. For the most part, the category differences reflect location—such as midships versus aft. Cabins are richly decorated in light hues and earth tones, and all have safes, hair dryers, minifridges, and TVs. Storage is adequate and offers more closet shelves than drawer space. Cabin balconies are tiered so that they get more sunlight, but this also means your neighbors above can look down at you. Be discreet.

A standard outside cabin without a balcony, such as categories F and FF, ranges from 165 to 210 square feet, while insides, such as category JJ, measure 160 square feet. Balcony cabins range from 165 to 257 square feet, including the balcony. At 324 square feet, including the balcony, the 180 minisuites on each vessel are ultracomfortable, with a roomy sitting area with a full-size pullout couch, two televisions, minifridge, large bathroom with full tub and shower, generous closet and drawer space, and terry robes. When Heidi sailed with her young sons on the *Caribbean Princess,* she had two cribs set up in the living area and there was still plenty of space for playing. Storage was so plentiful that even the kids' copious gear didn't fill it all.

Two Grand Suites measure 782 square feet and feature all the above amenities plus a bathroom with large whirlpool tub and multidirectional shower, and a separate toilet compartment. There are two 607-square-foot family suites that can sleep up to eight, with two bathrooms. Minibars in the suites are stocked once on a complimentary basis with soda, bottled water, beer, and liquor. Suite guests are also on the receiving end of a slew of perks highlighted in the "Service" section earlier.

Lifeboats partially or completely obstruct the views from most cabins on Emerald Deck. More than 600 cabins can accommodate a third passenger in an upper berth. Each ship has 28 wheelchair-accessible cabins.

PUBLIC AREAS These are huge ships with a not-so-huge feeling. Because of their smart layout, six dining venues, expansive outdoor deck space, multiple sports facilities, four pools, and nine hot tubs, passengers are dispersed rather than concentrated into one or two main areas. Even sailing with a full load of passengers (as many as 3,100

on *Grand, Golden,* and *Star* if all additional berths in every cabin are filled, and almost 3,800 on *Caribbean, Crown, Emerald,* and *Ruby*), you'll wonder where everyone is.

Coupled with this smart layout is Princess's pleasing-if-plain contemporary decor. Public areas are done up in tasteful caramel-colored wood tones and color schemes of warm blue, teal, and rust, with some brassy details and touches of marble.

While the decor is soothing, the entertainment is pretty hot. Three main entertainment venues include a well-equipped two-story theater for big Vegas-style musical revues; a second one-level show lounge for smaller-scale entertainment such as hypnotists and singers; and the travel-themed Explorer's Lounge, decorated with vaguely Islamic tile motifs, African and Asian art pieces, primitivist exotic paintings, and a dark, woodsy atmosphere. It's a venue for bands, comedians, or karaoke nightly. There's also the clubby, old-world Wheelhouse Bar, offering laid-back pre- and post-dinner dancing and jazz in an elegant setting, as well as a woodsy sports bar and a wine bar selling caviar by the ounce and wine, champagne, and iced vodka by the glass. For gamblers, each ship offers a sprawling casino.

Skywalkers multilevel disco/observation lounge, sequestered 150 feet above the ship's stern like a high-tech treehouse, is a unique spot offering floor-to-ceiling windows with two impressive views: forward for a look over the ship itself, or back toward the sea and the giant vessel's very impressive wake. It's well positioned away from any cabins (so the noise won't keep anyone up) and is our favorite disco at sea. Check out the view at sunset or read a book during the day.

For kids, the indoor/outdoor Fun Zone kids' play area has tons of games, toys, computers, and an outdoor, fenced-in play area equipped with a fleet of tricycles and mini-basketball setup. Nearly always deserted (we're told there are rarely more than 10 children age 2 and under on any given cruise), it's an awesome place to let your little ones run free while you sit on the sidelines and relax. A kiddie pool is located nearby. A separate teen center has several computers, plus video games, a dance floor, and a sound system. On *Grand* and *Golden,* there's also a teens-only sunbathing area with deck chairs and a hot tub, as well as a truly amazing arcade.

Each ship also has a library, a small writing room, a card room, a large Internet center (moderate pricing, slow speed), and an attractive wedding chapel where the captain himself performs about six or seven bona fide, legal marriages on almost every cruise.

DINING OPTIONS Each ship has three pleasant, one-story main dining rooms, laid out on slightly tiered levels. By way of some strategically placed waist-high dividers, they feel cozy, although the ceilings are a tad on the low side. The 24-hour Horizon Court casual restaurant offers buffet-style breakfasts and lunches and is designed to feel much cozier than it actually is. With clusters of buffet stations serving stir-fry, beef, turkey, pork, and lots of fruit, salads, cheeses, and more, lines are kept to a minimum and you're hardly aware of the space's enormity. This restaurant turns into a sit-down bistro from 11pm to 4am, with the same dinner menu each night. If you like the idea of New York strip sirloin at midnight, this is the place to go.

For a more intimate yet still casual meal, there are two alternative, reservations-required restaurants. Sabatini's specializes in Italian cuisine, featuring an eight-course menu emphasizing seafood. Service is first rate and the food is tasty. The second venue is the Sterling Steakhouse, where you can choose your favorite cut of beef and have it cooked to order. *Caribbean, Crown, Emerald,* and *Ruby Princess* also offer the Café Caribe, a themed buffet carved out of the Horizon Court, serving Caribbean specialties such as jerk chicken, grilled Caribbean rock lobster, whole roast suckling pig,

Guiana pepper pots and curries, and paella-style prawns. Musicians play Caribbean music, and guests can order their meal cooked to taste at the cafe's open kitchen. There's no cover charge here. On *Caribbean, Crown, Star, Emerald,* and *Ruby,* the International Café serves food 24 hours a day—pastries in the morning; tapas, panini, and the like later; and fondue, gelato, and fresh-baked cookies 'round the clock (with some items at extra charge). *Ruby, Crown,* and *Emerald Princess* also offer a no-charge pub-style lunch on sea days serving traditional pub fare including fish and chips, bangers and mash, and cottage pie. Additionally, suite guests can enjoy complimentary breakfast in Sabatini's with complimentary breakfast cocktails and the full breakfast menu, plus specialty items such as brioche French toast and freshly made Belgian waffles.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The Grand-class ships have around 1¼ acres of open deck space, so it's not hard to find a quiet place to soak in the sun. On *Grand, Golden,* and *Star,* our favorite spot on a hot, humid day is portside aft on the deck overlooking the swimming pool, where the tail fin vent blows cool air. It's like having an outdoor air-conditioner. In 2006 Princess introduced a different kind of wonderful at a space called The Sanctuary, which is now installed on all the Grand-class ships. Three-quarters canopied and dotted with lounge chairs, trees, and private cabanas, it's a perfect onboard chill-out space, staffed with "serenity stewards" tasked with making sure things stay quiet. Light meals, massages, and beverages are available. Admission carries a $10 fee for half-day use, a measure intended to limit use to those who really want some peace and quiet.

The ships have four great swimming pools. On *Grand, Golden,* and *Star,* one has a retractable roof for inclement weather. Another aft, under the disco, feels miles from the rest of the ship, while outside the spa a resistance pool allows you to swim steadily against a current. The fourth pool is for kids. Other recreational offerings include a Sports Deck with a jogging track and a 300-square-foot outdoor LED movie screen for watching movies under the stars (and kid's movies during the day). You can reserve deck chairs for the evening feature films, and, yes, there's popcorn (free) and Raisinettes (for a price). It's great fun, and the sound and picture are awesome.

Spa, gym, and salon facilities are located in a large, almost separate part of each ship, surrounding the lap pool set among tiered, amphitheater-style wooden benches. As is the case fleetwide with Princess, the oceanview gym is surprisingly small for ships of this size, although there's an unusually large aerobics floor.

The Diamond Class: Diamond Princess • Sapphire Princess

The Verdict

Diamond and *Sapphire* are two of the best megaships ever, with beautiful proportions, airy outdoor spaces, and clubby, intimate public areas.

Diamond Princess *(photo: Princess Cruises)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	116,000	Crew	1,100
Passengers (double occ.)	2,670	Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.4 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio	42.3	Year Launched	2004
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	1,337/748	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	N/A

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4.5	Dining Options	4
Appearance & Upkeep	5	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4.5
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	5
Decor	4.5	Enjoyment Factor	5

Built in Nagasaki, Japan, *Diamond* and *Sapphire* are Princess's best ships ever, with a design that's more sleek, graceful, and streamlined than the line's more visible Grand-class ships, while still embodying the idea of "big ship choice with small ship feel." Inside, the nearly identical vessels offer comfortable cabins; woodsy lounges with hints of seagoing history; understated central atrium lobbies; relaxing indoor/outdoor "Conservatory" pool areas; and large Asian-themed spas. Outside, in the stern, four decks descend in curved, horseshoelike tiers, creating a multilevel resort area with two pools, two hot tubs, two bars, and magnificent views of the ship's wake. One of our favorite things about these ships is that the Promenade Deck wraps around the bow, just below the open top deck, offering a view straight out to where you're going. When we sailed, we walked up there late one moonless night and made a discovery: With the whistling wind drowning out the ship's hum and no light coming from above, behind, or to the sides, the starry sky and dark sea merge and you feel as if you're all alone, flying into outer space.

The only thing that keeps these vessels from a five-star rating is their relative dearth of dining options: Even though there are eight restaurants in all, five of them offer the same basic menu (though a steakhouse and Italian trattoria do liven up your options). That said, Princess has significantly improved its cuisine in recent years, so what you do get is cherce.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$64	168	yes	yes	no	yes
Outside	$71	183–275	yes	yes	no	yes
Suite	$171	354–1,329*	yes	yes	yes	yes

** Includes veranda*

CABINS Though cabins on *Diamond* and *Sapphire* are a bit bigger than those on the Grand- and Coral-class ships, they still stick close to the Princess family look, with upholstery and walls done in easy-on-the-eyes earth tones and off whites, all trimmed in butterscotch wood. All have safes, hair dryers, minifridges, and TVs. Standard inside and outside cabins are smaller than those aboard the newer Holland America and Carnival ships, but are still comfortable and stylish, and more than 70% of

outside cabins have verandas. Balconies are tiered, ensuring direct sunlight for those on decks 8 and 9 (where most of the popular minisuites are located), but also ensuring voyeurism, as folks standing on the balconies above can look right down on you. Standard cabin bathrooms have smallish shower stalls and adequate counter space.

Minisuites provide substantially more space without jumping into the cost stratosphere. All have those big, less-than-private balconies and offer sizable sitting areas with sofa beds and two televisions, one facing the sitting area and the other the bed (cheaper and less bothersome, the line told us, than installing a Lazy Susan to swivel a single TV). They're ideal for families with children. Bathrooms have bathtubs and more counter space than standard cabins. Storage space in both standard outsides and minisuites is more than adequate, with a large shelved closet and open-sided clothes rack facing a small dressing alcove by the bathroom door. Sixteen full suites have curtained-off sitting and sleeping areas, very large balconies, complimentary stocked minibar, robes, a walk-in closet, and separate whirlpool tubs and showers in the bathroom. Suite guests are also on the receiving end of numerous perks highlighted in the "Service" section, earlier.

Twenty-seven cabins on each ship are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS These ships are huge—a fact you'll learn the first time you have to walk from one end to the other to retrieve something you forgot in your cabin. On the other hand, when you're sitting in one of their cozy lounges or bars, you might well think you're on a 40,000-ton ship rather than one three times that size. It's an appealing combination, giving passengers a large ship's range of options in a more personal, human-scaled package. You don't feel like you're lost in the crowd.

Most public rooms on these ships are on Decks 6 and 7. Toward the bow, the two-deck Princess Theater is the main show space, with tiers of upholstered theater seats (with little cocktail tables that fold out of their armrests, airline-style) and a pair of opera boxes to either side of the large stage. It's a very minimalist room, and a very appealing one, putting the emphasis on the stage rather than distracting with fanciful decor. Just outside the entrance is the clubby Churchill's, a classically decorated cigar bar with TVs for sports. You'll also find a multipurpose entertainment lounge called Club Fusion, used principally for games (think bingo and talent shows) and evening music. Down a spiral staircase in the back of the room, you'll find one of our favorite spaces, the very small, cozy Wake View Bar, a classy nook full of dark wood, leather chairs, and paintings depicting turn-of-the-20th-century tobacconists. TVs are tuned to sports (though the sound is often off), and six portholes overlook the namesake wake. Few people seem to venture down here, so let's keep it to ourselves, okay?

At midships are two of Princess's signature lounge spaces: the English-adventurer-themed Explorer's Lounge and the ocean-liner-themed Wheelhouse Bar, the former a secondary show lounge for comedians, impressionists, and other small-scale entertainment; the latter the prime space aboard for elegant music, with a jazz combo playing in the evenings. Decor matches the name for both rooms, with Egyptian art, jungle-pattern carpeting, clubby furniture, and faux Moorish screens in Explorer's, and leather couches, dark wood, brass candlestick sconces, and paintings of old P&O liners in Wheelhouse. There's dancing here, but the "I love the nightlife, I like to boogie" crowd is more likely to be up in the top-deck disco, the highest point of the ship, with a balcony looking back over the stern if you want to head out for air or romance.

Explorer's jungle theme carries over into the ships' casinos, with their tree-trunk pillars and leafy ceilings. Next door, the three-story atrium is admirably restrained, with lots

of creamy marble and wood, understated grillwork art fronting the atrium elevators, and musicians performing throughout the day. Opening off the space are the relaxing library, the charmingly old-fashioned writing room, several shops, a coffee bar, and Crooners, a Rat Pack–themed bar serving 56 different martini recipes in two sizes: the standard "Sinatra" and the supersized (and misspelled) "Deano." Clusters of low-slung wicker-frame chairs along the windows give a '50s-rumpus-room effect. Very slinky.

On Deck 7, the Internet Café is notable not only for being large and exceedingly stylish (among the most attractive at sea), but also for being a cafe in more than just name: A bar toward the back dispenses gourmet coffee for a few bucks, along with free croissants and sweet rolls. Passengers who bring their laptops can connect wirelessly here, as well as in the atrium. Four computer terminals are also located in the atrium's library, and computer classes are generally held in the wedding chapel, just across from the Wheelhouse Bar.

For kids, *Diamond*'s and *Sapphire*'s Fun Zone centers are divided into four separate and sizable rooms, segregating kids by age. Younger tots get a climbing maze, flower-backed chairs, toys, computers, and a great, cushiony amphitheater for watching movies. Teens get a sort of Austin Powers–looking room, brightly colored and looking much like a normal adult bar. "That was on purpose," one Princess exec told us. "What teen wants to be treated like a kid?"

DINING OPTIONS Passengers opting for traditional dining take their meals in the 518-seat International Dining Room, with its simple but elegant wood-panel walls and classical paintings, or in the smaller Vivaldi Restaurant, with its 18th-century European decor. Passengers on the anytime-dining program can dine in any of four smaller themed dining rooms, all serving the same menus, but with one specialty dish themed to that room.

Guests wanting to gorge long and hard should make a reservation at Sabatini's, the extra-cost Italian trattoria, which serves eight-course, 2½-hour meals. Meat lovers can make a reservation at the Sterling Steakhouse. For ultracasual dining, head to the Horizon Court buffet.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES Like most megaships, *Diamond* and *Sapphire* have two pools at midships: a partying main pool out in the sun and a secondary "Conservatory" space with a large pool, two hot tubs, a balcony (which does double duty as sunning space and as a venue for the line's pottery-making classes), and a retractable roof for bad weather. Our favorite outdoor spaces are in the stern, where four decks descend in curved, horseshoelike tiers, creating a multilevel resort with two pools, two hot tubs, two bars, and a magnificent view of the ship's wake.

Another pool, this one an adults-only resistance pool for swimming laps in place, is set in a cleft just outside the large, well-appointed spa. The spa is totally minimalist in its elegant Asian theme, with a great suite of steam rooms and stone lounging chairs for guests to use before or after their treatment. Next door, the gym is one of the few sour notes on board—well stocked (and with little TVs on all the aerobics machines), but still inadequately small considering the number of people aboard. When we sailed, it got crowded often. A large aerobics studio is attached, offering spinning, yoga, and other aerobics and fitness classes (mostly for $10 a class).

Out on Deck 16, at the top of a very quietly marked stairway and almost completely shielded from wind and view, is a small miniature-golf course. More serious golfers can play illusory courses at a virtual-reality center farther forward, near a nicely designed, covered and netted sports court suitable for basketball and volleyball.

The Coral Class: Coral Princess • Island Princess

Coral Princess *(photo: Matt Hannafin)*

The Verdict

Beautiful, spacious, and at the same time surprisingly intimate, *Coral* and *Island* offer beautiful looks inside and out, a nice range of entertainment options and venues, and great onboard learning experiences.

Specifications

Size (in tons)	91,627	Crew	981
Passengers (double occ.)	1,970	Passenger/Crew Ratio	2 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio	46.5	Year Launched	2003
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	987/727	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	N/A

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

★★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4.5	Dining Options	4
Appearance & Upkeep	5	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	4
Decor	4.5	Enjoyment Factor	4.5

Coral Princess and *Island Princess* are two of the loveliest cruise vessels out there, further refining Princess's vision of mega-size ships with an intimate feel. Outside, there are balconies on some 83% of their outside cabins, but their tiered design is a vast improvement over the typical megaship "wall of balconies" look, contributing to a clean and flowing profile. Up top, the ships' futuristic-looking but purely decorative jet-engine funnels give you the impression the ships are going to fly right out of the water and into orbit.

Built to juuuussst be able to squeeze through the Panama Canal (with approx. 2 ft. of space on each side), these ships are extremely spacious and well laid out, and never feel crowded even when full. Though they're a fifth larger than the line's older Sun-class ships, they carry only 20 more passengers apiece based on double occupancy, meaning more room for you. Understated interiors are both classic and modern, with Internet centers and Times Square–style news tickers right around the corner from woodsy, almost Edwardian lounges. Our favorite spaces: the clubby Wheelhouse Bar for a before-dinner drink; the bar at the New Orleans–themed Bayou Restaurant for jazz until around midnight; the peaceful, Balinese-style solarium, where your book will have to be damn good to keep you from dozing off; and the Universe Lounge for everything from cooking classes and lectures to full-blown production performances.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$64	160	yes	yes	no	yes
Outside	$71	168–232	yes	yes	no	yes
Suite	$193	323–591*	yes	yes	yes	yes

** Includes veranda*

CABINS Decor sticks to Princess's fleetwide standard, with upholstery and walls done in easy-on-the-eyes earth tones and off whites, all trimmed in butterscotch wood. All have safes, hair dryers, minifridges, and TVs. Inside and standard outside cabins are serviceable, but don't expect much room to stretch out—at 160 and 168 square feet, respectively, they're on the low end of average in the mainstream category, much larger than on Princess's Sun-class ships and some ships in the Costa and NCL fleets, but nowhere near the 185 to 195 square feet you get with the newer Carnival, Holland America, and Disney ships. Most private balconies are set up in descending tiers—a positive for soaking up the sun, a negative for total privacy. Standard cabin bathrooms have smallish shower stalls and adequate counter space.

Minisuites provide substantially more space without jumping into the cost stratosphere, and have larger balconies and sizable sitting areas with sofa beds and two televisions, one facing the sitting area and the other the bed—an odd touch since there's no partition, but what the hell. Bathrooms have bathtubs and more counter space than in standard cabins. Storage space in both standard outsides and minisuites is more than adequate, with a large shelved closet and open-sided clothes rack facing a small dressing alcove by the bathroom door. Sixteen full suites have curtained-off sitting and sleeping areas, very large balconies, complimentary stocked minibars, robes, whirlpool tubs and separate showers in the bathroom, and a walk-in closet. Suite guests get additional perks highlighted in the "Service" section earlier.

Twenty cabins on each ship are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS Layout is one of the areas in which these vessels really shine, with decks and public areas arranged so it's always easy to find your way around. Most indoor public spaces are on Decks 6 and 7, starting with the large Princess Theater in the bow. Unlike the ornately decorated two- and three-deck theaters on many new ships, this is a classic sloping one-level space, decorated with no theme whatsoever. You get a good view from every one of the comfortable theater seats, which have little flip-up tables in their arms to hold drinks or, when the room is used for lectures or other enrichment activities, your notebook. Farther aft, the Explorer's Lounge is a smaller-scale show lounge for comedians, karaoke, game shows, and dancing, decorated to evoke the romantic European explorers of the 19th century, with vaguely Islamic tile motifs, African and Asian art pieces, primitivist exotic paintings on the walls, and a dark, woodsy atmosphere. Important sports events are broadcast here on multiple large screens. In the stern, the Universe Lounge is an innovative multipurpose space, hosting TV-style cooking demonstrations (with a full kitchen onstage), computer classes (with hookups for 50 computers around the room), lectures, and full-blown production performances on three low interconnected stages, which revolve and rise and segment and contort and do more things than you think a stage could—it's a regular three-ring circus. Shows are tailored to utilize all these options, with much of the action taking place at ground level for a true floor-show feel.

Some standout bars and lounges include the maritime-themed Wheelhouse Bar, an intimate spot decorated in classic dark woods, with heavy leather and corduroy armchairs and love seats, faux marble pillars, domed ceiling lights, and small end-table lamps. In the evening, a small band performs smooth jazz and pop numbers for dancing, and some afternoons the ships' string quartets perform classical repertoire. At one entrance to the lounge, a small museum displays memorabilia from P&O history. Nearby, the low-key four-deck atrium is surrounded by the ships' shops, Internet center, news ticker and several other rooms. Churchill's cigar lounge is a cozy room with

big windows, a humidor under a portrait of the room's namesake, and armchairs and sofas seating just 10 people. Crooners is a Rat Pack–themed piano bar with a Vegas/martini vibe. A real live crooner performs at the piano each evening.

One level down, the ship's library and card room are both exceptionally large and comfortable, though the layout—with entrances both from the atrium and from the midships elevators/stair tower—means that people often use the rooms as a passageway, adding more bustle than we'd like in a library. Themed casinos (London on *Coral,* Paris on *Island*) and a wedding chapel round out the adult public room offerings.

At the stern on Deck 12, there's the bright and very kid-scaled Fun Zone and Pelican's Playhouse children's center and smallish Off Limits teen center, with computers and a dance floor. Outside are a children's play area and the small Pelican Pool. The ships' bright pottery studio is hidden away back here as well, giving it the feel of a playroom for grown-ups.

DINING OPTIONS To accommodate Princess's Personal Choice concept, two similar dining rooms—the Provence and the Bordeaux—are dedicated to traditional fixed-seating dining and to anytime Personal Choice dining, respectively. Both single-level rooms are understated and spacious, with lots of elbow room (except, that is, in the unusually narrow arm chairs at some tables).

There are two specialty restaurants aboard: Sabatini's Trattoria ($20 per person) for eight-course Italian extravaganzas and the Bayou Cafe and Steakhouse ($15 per person), a New Orleans–themed restaurant with a subdued, woodsy ambience, faux brick walls, lantern lighting, and primitivist New Orleans murals on the walls. Dinners here include a barbecued alligator ribs appetizer and main courses like seafood gumbo, fried catfish, grilled jumbo prawns, and chicken-and-chorizo jambalaya. Steak options include New York strip and porterhouse. A jazz trio plays during dinner, then continues on until midnight for patrons of the attached bar. Tables are sprinkled with Mardi Gras beads for extra atmosphere.

The ships' 24-hour Horizon Court buffet restaurants are comfortable enough, though the circular layout of the food stations—and no clear path through them—often leads to light chaos. Overlooking the main pool, the Grill serves burgers, dogs, and the like in the afternoon, with excellent pizza available one deck down (just forward of the pool) and extra-cost ice cream and fresh juices available aftward at the solarium's ice-cream bar and juice bar. Inside, at the bottom of the atrium, La Patisserie is a pleasant lounge/cafe serving regular coffee free and specialty coffees at extra cost, with cookies and sweets free for the taking. As the room is almost at sea level, it's a great spot from which to watch the waves go by, and it's worth spending at least a minute here as your ship goes through the Panama Canal, with the canal walls literally only a couple of feet away. It's a startlingly weird experience.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The ships' main pool areas are spacious but surprisingly plain, with a main pool and three large hot tubs surrounded by sunning areas. A steel-drum duo performs on a tiny, low-key stage at one end during the day. Moving toward the stern, the solarium (aka the Lotus Pool) is a much more interesting area, decorated with a Balinese motif that gives a sense of tranquillity—though if there are lots of kids aboard, that tranquillity probably won't last. The stylish wooden deck chairs here (and the more traditional "Royal Teak" ones on the wraparound Promenade Deck) are much classier than the white plastic loungers around the main pool. A sliding-glass roof protects the area during inclement weather. Up on the Sports Deck there's a wading pool for adults.

Fitness facilities include a surprisingly small though reasonably equipped gym, plus a relatively large separate aerobics room. Up on the top decks there are a basketball/volleyball court, a computerized golf simulator, and a 9-hole miniature-golf course. Though the latter is in the open air, you have to enter through a windowless wooden door that makes it look permanently closed. It's not; just go on in.

In the stern on Deck 14, the Balinese-themed Lotus Spa offers the usual massage, mud, and beauty treatments, plus a thermal suite (a unisex room offering various heat treatments) and a lovely seaview salon. For what it's worth—because the spa is run by Steiner (the company that runs almost all cruise ship spas) and personnel change regularly—we had one of our best cruise ship massages on *Coral Princess,* an almost painful deep-tissue sports massage that left us feeling completely loose and refreshed.

The Sun Class: Sun • Dawn • Sea Princess

Sun Princess *(photo: Princess Cruises)*

The Verdict

Though remnants from another century, these older Princess ships offer a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere without too much flash.

Specifications

Size (in tons)	77,000	Year Launched	
Passengers (double occ.)	1,950	*Sun Princess*	1995
Passenger/Space Ratio	39.5	*Dawn Princess*	1997
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	975/410	*Sea Princess*	1998
Crew	900	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	N/A
Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.2 to 1	*Dawn Princess*	2009

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	4
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	4
Decor	5	Enjoyment Factor	4

Here's the scoop on *Sea Princess, Dawn Princess,* and *Sun Princess:* They're just like all the other Princess ships, only less so. Being among the line's oldest vessels, they're the ones that led the way toward the design Princess has used ever since. They're pretty ships, with a decor that mixes classic and modern, using materials such as varnished hardwoods, marble, etched glass, granite, and textured fabrics. The look doesn't sock you between the eyes with its daring and is in fact a bit plain Jane: comfortable, quiet, and (so far) aging gracefully. Light color schemes predominate, with lots of beiges, and their layout is very easy to navigate. By the end of the first day you'll know where everything is.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$71	135–148	yes	yes	no	yes
Outside	$93	147–160	yes	yes	no	yes
Suite	$243	365–678*	yes	yes	yes	yes

** Includes veranda*

CABINS Though cabins on these vessels are divided into some 28 categories, there are actually fewer than 10 configurations—for the most part, the category differences reflect location (midships versus aft, and so on), and thus price. More than 400 cabins on each vessel boast private balconies, though they're small at about 3×8½ feet. And that leads to our main point: The staterooms on these ships are cramped. Standard outside cabins, such as categories BC and BD, are 178 square feet *including* their balconies, while Carnival's standards, by comparison, are nearly 186 square feet without balconies. On these ships, what little balcony space you gain is deducted from your room.

Each ship's six suites sprawl out over 678 square feet of space and include robes to use while aboard and minibars stocked once on a complimentary basis with soda, bottled water, beer, and liquor. Suite guests also get a slew of perks highlighted in the "Service" section above. The 32 minisuites on each ship are really nice, with a separate bedroom area divided from the sitting area by a curtain. Each has a pullout sofa, a chair and desk, a minifridge, two TVs, a walk-in closet, and a whirlpool tub and shower in a separate room from the toilet and sink. All cabins have minifridges, safes, TVs, and hair dryers, and 300 will accommodate third passengers in upper berths.

Nineteen cabins on each vessel are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS These ships have a decidedly unglitzy decor that relies on lavish amounts of wood, glass, marble, and collections of original paintings, statues, and lithographs. The one-story showrooms offer good lighting and sound and unobstructed views from every seat, and several spaces in the back are reserved for wheelchair users. The smaller Vista Lounge also presents entertainment, with good sightlines and comfortable cabaret-style seating. The elegant, nautical-motif Wheelhouse Bar is done in warm, dark-wood tones and features small bands, sometimes with a vocalist; it's the perfect spot for pre- or post-dinner drinks.

There's a dark and sensuous disco; a bright, spacious casino; a wine bar selling caviar by the ounce and wine, champagne, and iced vodka by the glass; and lots of little lounges for an intimate rendezvous.

DINING OPTIONS These ships' two dining rooms offer an intimate feel, their expanse broken up by dividers topped with frosted glass. Each ship also has two alternative dining venues. The sit-down pizzeria (no extra charge) on Dolphin Deck is open approximately 11am to 2:30pm and 7pm to 1am for casual dining, with tables seating two, four, and six. Sorry, no takeout or delivery. The Sterling Steakhouse ($15 per person) is set out of the wind just outside the Horizon Court, overlooking the main pool, and is open from 6 to 10pm. On Alaska sailings, the steakhouse option is moved inside to one side of the 24-hour Horizon Court buffet restaurant, which also offers an ultracasual option for all meals, including sit-down bistro-style dinners from 11pm to 4am.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The pool decks on these ships are well laid out, with three adult pools (one of them in the stern), one kids' wading pool, and hot tubs scattered around the Riviera Deck, along with (on *Sea Princess* and *Dawn Princess*) a 300-square-foot LED movie screen for showing feature films, sports events, and other entertainment. Three spacious decks are open for sunbathing, and *Dawn* also offers an adults-only Sanctuary relaxation zone.

The ships' gyms are appealing, and though they're on the small side for vessels of this size, they're actually roomier than the ones on the much larger Grand-class ships. Aerobics, stretching, and meditation classes are available in the conversely spacious aerobics room, and the nearby spas offer the usual massages, mud treatments, and facials. The teak Promenade Deck provides space for joggers, walkers, and shuffleboard players, and a computerized golf center called Princess Links simulates the trickiest holes at some of the world's best golf courses.

Royal • Pacific • Ocean Princess

The Verdict

Clubby, cozy, midsize vessels that offer some of Princess's most interesting and world-ranging itineraries, in an atmosphere that mimics similarly sized ocean liners of yesteryear.

Pacific Princess *(photo: Princess Cruises)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)		*Pacific/Ocean*	334/232
Royal	30,200	Crew	
Pacific/Ocean	30,277	*Royal*	381
Passengers (double occ.)		*Pacific/Ocean*	373
Royal	710	Guests/Crew Ratio	1.8 to 1
Pacific/Ocean	670	Year Launched	
Passenger/Space Ratio		*Royal*	2001
Royal	42.5	*Pacific/Ocean*	1999
Pacific/Ocean	45.2	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins		*Royal*	2007
Royal	355/257	*Pacific/Ocean*	2003

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	4
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4
Public Comfort/Space	4.5	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	4

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Renaissance Cruises built eight nearly identical midsize vessels, and then promptly went belly up. Princess was one of the beneficiaries: Over the next few years, it purchased three of the lovely little ships, which it renamed *Pacific Princess, Tahitian Princess* (since renamed *Ocean Princess*), and *Royal Princess.* Like all of the former Renaissance vessels, they're comfortable, traditional, and sedate, with an emphasis on intimate spaces—just like Princess's larger ships, but here it's the real thing. Like European boutique hotels, they're decorated mostly in warm, dark woods and rich fabrics, and offer a small-scale, clubby feel that larger ships can only hope to mimic.

Oceania's *Regatta, Insignia,* and *Nautica,* and Azamara's *Journey* and *Quest* are also ex-Renaissance vessels. All eight ships are nearly identical, save for renovations each line has effected to make the ships their own. For 2010, *Ocean Princess* will be sailing in Asia.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$167	158	yes	yes	yes	yes
Outside	$177	146–216*	yes	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$378	322–962*	yes	yes	yes	yes

** Including veranda*

CABINS Staterooms are straightforward, no-nonsense spaces with a hint of modern European city hotel: plain off-white walls, tasteful wood trim and furniture, and cheery carpeting and bedspreads. The vast majority are oceanview doubles, some with a balcony and some without, and average about 165 square feet—neither tiny nor huge, but perfectly adequate for most people. All come with a sofa or sofa bed, a minifridge, TV, and vanity. Closet space is just about adequate for the typically longer voyages these ships sail, so don't pack too heavily. Drawer space and storage room under the beds helps. Bathrooms in standard cabins verge on cramped, with a fairly small shower stall. Balconies are on the small side, large enough for only a small table and chairs. Five standards in the starboard center of Deck 6 have views obstructed by lifeboats.

On *Pacific Princess,* most cabins on Deck 9 are 322-square-foot minisuites with balconies, adding to the standard cabin amenities a bathtub and a larger seating area with a cocktail table for intimate in-room dining. On both ships, 10 Owner's Suites measure 786 to 962 square feet and are located at the ships' bow and stern, offering separate bedroom and sitting room (with dining area and sofa or sofa bed), two bathrooms (one with whirlpool tub/shower), wraparound balconies, two TVs, minifridges, and substantial closet space. Suite guests get a slew of perks, as highlighted in the "Service" section earlier.

Three cabins on *Royal Princess* and five on *Pacific Princess* are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS Like all the former Renaissance vessels, *Pacific Princess, Ocean Princess,* and *Royal Princess* are elegant yet homey ships, with classic styling that includes dark-wood paneling, fluted columns, ornate railings and faux fireplaces, gilt-framed classical paintings, Oriental-style carpets, frilly moldings, marble and brass accents, faux skylights, and deep-hued upholstery. Think Edwardian sitting room, minus the palm trees. Passengers enter into a modest two-story reception Atrium that (intentionally or not—and we suspect the former) mimics the famous Grand Staircase from *Titanic.* In the bow on Deck 10, the spacious observatory lounge has floor-to-ceiling

windows and cozy seating areas, and is used for dancing in the evenings and for various activities during the day. Farther astern on the same deck, the cozy, beautifully appointed library is decorated in a traditional English style, with high-back chairs and deep-cushioned couches, faux mahogany paneling, marble faux fireplace, and a trompe l'oeil garden skylight.

Most of the other public rooms are on Deck 5. Upfront, the Cabaret Lounge seats about 350 and offers performances on its floor-level stage. At midships, a smallish but comfortable casino offers gaming tables and slots, while the attached Casino Bar offers musical entertainment in the evenings. A card room and Internet center on Deck 9 round out the public room offerings.

DINING OPTIONS The main dining room is an elegant single-level space surrounded on three sides by windows. It's spacious and understated, with simple wood-veneer wall panels and lighting sconces. Just outside the maître d's station is the cozy, country-club-esque Club Bar, the perfect spot for a pre-dinner drink.

Up on Deck 10, in the stern, are the ships' two alternative restaurants: Sabatini's for Italian cuisine and the Sterling Steakhouse for slabs of beef. Intimately sized (seating only about 90 passengers each), they're decorated to match their cuisine: Mediterranean style for Sabatini's, dark woods for Sterling. The restaurants are open on alternating nights. In the stern on Deck 9 is a buffet restaurant that incorporates a pizzeria and barbecue. There's also a pool grill out on deck.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES Each ship has a central pool area with a small pool and two hot tubs, surrounded by wall-to-wall deck chairs. A short jogging track (approximately 11 laps per mile) wraps around the deck above, while one deck above that (Sun Deck), there's additional sunning space, a golf practice cage, and shuffleboard. Just forward of the pool area, the smallish Lotus Spa offers massages, facials, and other treatments, while the next-door salon makes you gorgeous. A decent-size oceanview gym with aerobics floor is attached. Just forward of the spa is a small outdoor lounging area with a hydrotherapy whirlpool overlooking the bow. It's probably the most private sunning spot on the ship, save for your private balcony.

12 Royal Caribbean International

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THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL Royal Caribbean's ships are good-looking, activity-packed, BIG floating resorts, and the line is among the most innovative in the cruise biz, always adding something that's never been seen at sea before. Surfing, rock climbing, ice skating, boxing, ziplining . . . what's next? **Sails to:** Caribbean, Panama Canal, Alaska, Mexican Riviera, Bermuda, Hawaii, Canada/New England (plus Europe, transatlantic, South America, Australia/New Zealand).

THE EXPERIENCE Royal Caribbean prides itself on being ultrainnovative and cutting edge, pushing the envelope with each new class of ship it builds. If there's something that's never been done at sea before, Royal Caribbean will figure out how to offer it. The newest ship, *Oasis of the Seas,* gives new meaning to the phrase *over the top,* carrying a whopping 5,400 passengers and designed with citylike neighborhoods a la Central Park and cool stuff like an aqua theater. This oversized megacruiser was preceded by the three Freedom-class ships, which introduced a surfing simulator, full-size boxing ring, and "sprayground" to the cruise world. These fun, active, and

glamorous (but not too over-the-top-glitzy) megaships offer a great experience for a wide range of people, whether your idea of a good time is riding a wave or relaxing in the Solarium pool. There are huge children's centers for the kids, and elegant jazz clubs, kick-back sports bars, and flashy entertainment for adults. Decor-wise, these ships are a shade or two toned down from the Carnival brood: Rather than trying to overwhelm the senses, many of the public areas are understated and classy. The Radiance-class vessels are the line's most elegant to date, with a sophistication that's up near the level of Royal Caribbean's sister line, Celebrity Cruises.

Pros

- **Activity central:** With rock-climbing walls, surfing machines, water parks, basketball courts, miniature golf, ice skating, ziplines, and bungee trampolines among the many diversions, these ships are tops in the adrenaline department.
- **Pretty public areas:** Lounges, restaurants, and outdoor pool decks are well designed, spacious, glamorous, and just plain inviting.
- **Great solariums:** Solariums on the Vision-, Voyager-, Freedom-, Oasis-, and especially the Radiance-class ships are relaxing oases far away from the maddening crowd and designed around a theme (Venice, Africa, and so forth), a pool, and a pair of enormous whirlpool tubs.

Cons

- **Small cabins on the older ships:** At just about 120 to 160 square feet, most cabins aboard the line's pre-1999 vessels are downright tiny.
- **Too big:** Size, of course, is in the eye of the beholder. But when the *Oasis* sails full, 5,400 other shipmates along for the ride can be overwhelming for some.
- **Inconsistent dining:** On a recent cruise, main entrees were lukewarm and overall not impressive; hopefully it was just a bad week.

ROYAL CARIBBEAN: BIG HIP SHIPS

Royal Caribbean International (RCI) was the first company to launch a fleet specializing exclusively in Caribbean ports of call—hence the company name. In the late 1980s it expanded its horizons beyond the Caribbean (hence the "International") and now offers cruises in every major cruising region. It's the line that launched the megaship trend (with 1988's 73,192-ton *Sovereign of the Seas*), as well as the mega-megaship trend (with 1999's 3,114-passenger *Voyager of the Seas*), the super-duper-megaship trend (with the 3,634-passenger *Freedom of the Seas* in 2006), and the double-super-duper-megaship trend (with the 5,400-passenger *Oasis of the Seas* slated for delivery in November 2009, after this book goes to press; see the preview box below); but beyond

Compared with the other mainstream lines, here's how RCI rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor					✓
Dining				✓	
Activities					✓
Children's Program				✓	
Entertainment				✓	
Service				✓	
Worth the Money					✓

sheer size its ships have been innovative, challenging any traditional notions of cruise ship activities. *Voyager* launched the idea of ice-skating rinks, interior boulevards, and rock-climbing walls. Now with five Voyager-class vessels and the even larger Freedom-class ships in the water, these features almost seem standard. Who would have thought?

In 1997, Royal Caribbean acquired the smaller and more high-end Celebrity Cruises, which it continues to operate as a separate brand. For the past several years the two lines have been making incursions into Princess and Holland America's dominance of the **Alaska cruisetour** market, offering packages that include Whistler and the Canadian Rockies, plus train service between Anchorage and its distant cruise port in Seward, with 360-degree views available from glass-domed viewing cars.

PASSENGER PROFILE

You'll find all walks of life on a Royal Caribbean cruise: passengers in their 20s through 60s and older, mostly couples (including a good number of honeymooners), some singles traveling with friends, and also lots and lots of families. Overall, passengers are energetic, social, and looking for a good time, no matter what their age. While the majority of passengers come from somewhere in North America, the huge Voyager-, Freedom-, and Oasis-class ships in particular attract a lot of foreigners, including many Asians and Latin Americans.

Over the past several years the line has been making a push for younger, hipper, more active passengers via ad campaigns that portray the ships as a combination of hyperactive urban health club, chic restaurant district, and adventure-travel magic potion—which of course is a bit of a stretch. They're active, yes, but don't expect the Shackleton expedition (or the Four Seasons for that matter, either). RCI's shorter 3- and 4-night cruises tend to attract a more party-oriented crowd, as is the case with most short cruises.

DINING

Overall, the food is hit and miss. One dinner will be very tasty—like a Thai chicken dish and the Tuscan white-bean soup Heidi enjoyed on a recent cruise—and another will be disappointing—like the chewy pork chop, wilted salad drowned in dressing, and cold escargot Heidi didn't enjoy on another recent cruise. As aboard big ships at other lines, serving thousands of passengers a day doesn't always translate into a memorable dining experience. As far as dining times, Royal Caribbean has just started offering an alternative to the fixed early- and late-seating dinners in traditional main dining rooms. And just as with all the other mainstream lines, there are also many casual and specialty dining options.

TRADITIONAL In keeping with the flexible dining setup at the likes of Princess and NCL, Royal Caribbean's new "My Time Dining" reservation system means you can eat in the main restaurant whenever it is convenient for you between 6 and 9:30pm if you make a reservation with a maitre d' stationed outside the restaurant several hours a day. Flexible dining is typically offered on one level of the main restaurants, while diners are also having the more traditional two seatings on a different level, with typical entrees including poached Alaskan salmon, oven-roasted crispy duck served with a rhubarb sauce, sirloin steak marinated with Italian herbs and served over a chunky tomato stew, shrimp scampi, and often an Asian dish. At lunch and dinner, there's always a **light and healthy option** such as herb-crusted baked cod with steamed red-skinned potatoes and vegetables, or a pasta tossed with smoked

turkey, portobello mushrooms, and red-pepper pesto; as well as a **vegetarian option** such as vegetable strudel served in a puff pastry with black-bean salsa.

SPECIALTY Unlike lines such as NCL, Royal Caribbean hasn't gone overboard with alternative, extracharge specialty restaurants. Instead, it's integrated some new dining options into the casual and snacking categories. The Voyager-class ships each have one intimate, reservations-only Italian restaurant called Portofino ($20 per person), while the Radiance- and Freedom-class ships and *Mariner* and *Navigator of the Seas* have Portofino and the Chops Grill steakhouse ($25 per person). They're all attractive and intimate getaways, and food and service are the best on board, justifying the $20-per-person cover charge. Specialty restaurants are being installed on the line's older ships as they're renovated. The new *Oasis of the Seas,* meanwhile, will have four specialty restaurants in its Central Park neighborhood, offering both indoor and outdoor dining.

CASUAL Fleetwide, an open-seating casual dinner option is offered every night from 6:30 to 9:30pm in the buffet-style Windjammer Café. Meals follow the general theme of dinners in the main restaurants (Italian, Caribbean, and so on), and the room is made a bit more inviting through dimmed lighting and the addition of tablecloths. Long open hours mitigate the crowds on the bigger ships, but on a recent cruise aboard the *Rhapsody,* the place was a madhouse at lunchtime and we literally couldn't find a seat inside or out. You can also eat breakfast and lunch in the Windjammer—and most passengers do. Aboard *Oasis, Freedom, Liberty, Independence, Mariner, Navigator,* and *Monarch of the Seas,* the buffet area has an Asian specialty buffet called Jade, serving sushi and a variety of traditional and modern dishes. Aboard *Monarch* and *Majesty of the Seas,* an expanded buffet called the Windjammer Marketplace has a variety of themed islands for different regional cuisine, including Asian, Mediterranean, and Latin, plus a carving station, pasta station, and soup and salad bar.

RCI's Oasis-, Freedom-, and Voyager-class ships and the older *Monarch* and *Majesty* also have one of the most distinctive casual-dining options at sea: an honest-to-God **Johnny Rockets diner** with red vinyl booths and chrome accents, serving burgers, milkshakes, and other diner staples. There's a nominal $4.95-per-person service charge, and sodas and shakes are a la carte; but that doesn't stop lines from forming here during prime lunch and dinner times.

SNACKS & EXTRAS Freedom- and Voyager-class ships have an extensive coffee shop on the indoor promenade (serving a variety of pastries, sandwiches, and pizza) plus several self-serve soft ice-cream stations, free nacho-and-hot-dog-type snacks in the sports bars, and a multistation buffet restaurant. The line's other ships have similar options, with decent pizza served afternoons and late night for those suffering from postpartying munchies, and ice cream and toppings available throughout the day from a station in the Windjammer. The ships all have Latté-tudes coffee shops serving gourmet java, cookies, and other baked goods (all priced a la carte). *Oasis, Freedom, Independence, Liberty, Mariner, Monarch,* and *Navigator* also have a **Ben & Jerry's** ice-cream shop (costs extra too). There are no midnight buffets in the traditional sense, but something is always open for those with the late-night munchies, from the pizza counter to the Windjammer buffet and 24-hour room service.

A decent **kids' menu** features the usual options: burgers, hot dogs, fries, fish sticks, chicken tenders, spaghetti, and pizza, plus lots of desserts.

Room service is available 24 hours a day from a fairly routine, limited menu, though the rub is now you'll be charged $4.95 per order between midnight and 5am (don't be surprised if this becomes an industry trend).

ACTIVITIES

It's safe to say Royal Caribbean's ships offer the greatest variety of activities and sports facilities at sea. Fleetwide, you'll find **rock-climbing walls** (with multiple climbing tracks and training available) plus lots of typical cruise fare: spa and beauty demonstrations, art auctions, wine tastings, salsa and ballroom dance lessons, bingo, oddball crafts/hospitality classes (such as napkin folding), "horse race" gambling, and outrageous poolside games the likes of men's sexy legs contest, designed to draw big laughs. Sports facilities vary by ship: There are **ice-skating rinks** and in-line skating tracks on the Oasis-, Freedom-, and Voyager-class ships; combo basketball/volleyball courts on the Radiance-, Oasis-, Freedom-, Voyager-, and Vision-class ships; and miniature-golf courses on the Oasis, Freedom, Radiance, and Voyager classes as well as *Splendour* and *Legend of the Seas.* Though all the goodies hadn't been announced at press time, *Oasis* promises to offer all this plus more, from ziplining to an aqua theater (a pool with a movable floor for synchronized swimming and high-dive shows!). If shopping can be considered an activity, Royal Caribbean has an impressive selection of boutiques clustered somewhere near each ship's atrium.

For those whose goal is to not gain five pounds at the buffet, **gyms** are well equipped fleetwide, with specialized fitness classes such as yoga and cardio-kickboxing available for $10 per person. **Onboard spas** offer the usual range of massages, facials, and other beauty treatments like teeth whitening, but here's a piece of advice: If you want a treatment, sign up immediately after boarding, as these are big ships and a lot of people will be competing with you for desirable time slots. If you're flexible, you can often find more openings and special discounts on port days and off times.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

Year-round and fleetwide, Royal Caribbean offers its **Adventure Ocean** supervised kids' programs for children ages 3 to 17, divided into Aquanauts (ages 3–5), Explorers (6–8), Voyagers (9–11), Navigators (12–14), and older teens (15–17). All youth staff have college degrees in education, recreation, or a related field. Each ship has a large children's playroom and facilities for teens, with complimentary supervised activities offered on sea and port days. In general, the scope of the kids' facilities on the Oasis-, Freedom-, Voyager-, and Radiance-class ships far exceeds that of the rest of the fleet, with huge playrooms, and a large, sequestered outdoor deck with ship-shaped play equipment. The Oasis and Freedom ships offer a **water park** on a top deck that makes the lawn sprinklers we grew up with seem downright prehistoric. Radiance-class ships and *Voyager, Adventure,* and *Explorer* also have a water slide and a kids' pool. Activities fleetwide include movies, talent shows, karaoke, pizza and ice-cream parties, bingo, scavenger hunts, game shows, volleyball, face painting, and beach parties. **Internet access** is available to Adventure Ocean kids at half price (25¢ vs. 50¢ per minute for adults).

Several programs mix learning with play. The **Adventure Science** program entertains kids with fun yet educational scientific experiments like volcano making and projects that vaguely touch on meterology and fossils, while **Adventure Art,** offered in partnership with Crayola, focuses on art projects made with the company's crayons, modeling clay, glitter, glue, markers, and paint. **Adventure Theatre** exposes kids to theater arts via vocal and physical exercises, and activities that foster creativity. There are also activities geared to the whole family, including Mom and Dad. For younger kids (ages 6 months–3 years), RCI has partnered with Fisher-Price on a program of **supervised play dates** in which babies (6–18 months) and toddlers (19 months–3

Preview: RCI's Huuuuuuuge *Oasis of the Seas*

When Royal Caribbean debuted its 142,000-ton Voyager-class of ships in 1999, we thought they were the first ships that lived up to the "city at sea" cliché. When the line debuted its 160,000-ton Freedom class in 2006, we thought the vessels pushed the line, coming off as part mall, part theme park. Now Royal Caribbean is getting ready to introduce its—and the world's—biggest ship ever, the 220,000-ton, 5,400-passenger ***Oasis of the Seas*** (due in November 2009) and sister ship ***Allure of the Seas*** (2010), and it looks like while the theme park/mall concept will continue, it's been supersized and spiced with spaces and concepts no one would have imagined could ever be translated to a cruise ship.

When she launches, *Oasis of the Seas* will offer seven "neighborhoods" that, according to the line, "will provide vacationers with the opportunity to seek out relevant experiences in various locales based on their personal style, preference, or mood." Here are highlights of three of those neighborhoods, all of them extensions of the "Royal Promenade" concept aboard the line's Voyager- and Freedom-class ships. And they go like this:

- **Central Park** will offer a central space that's open to the sky, featuring pathways, seasonal flower gardens, and a canopy of trees. A central piazza will act as the ship's "town square," while six decks of balcony staterooms will line its canyon walls, offering views of the park below and sky above. Restaurants opening to the space will range from an elegant specialty restaurant to an alfresco cafe, an Italian restaurant, a steakhouse, and a wine bar. Among the several bars planned for the "park" is one that moves among three decks while you drink—which is not something we necessarily want our bar to do while we're drinking . . . but what the heck.
- **Boardwalk** will be another open-air space, modeled after seaside resorts like Coney Island. Positioned in *Oasis*'s stern, the boulevard is hemmed to port and starboard by six decks of cabins, each of which sports a rounded balcony with views of the action below: restaurants (including a malt

years) are invited to daily 45-minute play sessions with their parents in a designated lounge. Offered on all but embarkation day, the interactive dates incorporate music, storytelling, and a variety of Fisher-Price toys to explore physical development, problem-solving skills, cause and effect, and other lessons. In ship cabins, Fisher-Price TV offers programming for kids and you can also borrow Fisher-Price toys to play with in your cabin. (By the way, if you don't feel like schlepping your own stuff, you can now preorder organic baby food and Huggies-brand diapers, wipes, and creams for delivery into your cabin when you arrive. Go to Royal Caribbean's Shop Gifts & Gear section at www.royalcaribbean.com.) There's also a morning Stroll & Roll for parents who want push their infant and strollers around the ship's jogging track.

For teens, each ship has a **teen center,** a disco, and a video arcade. The Freedom-class ships, *Mariner, Navigator,* and *Monarch of the Seas* have three teens-only areas,

shop), shops, and carnival games. An original, handcrafted carousel—the first at sea—will be positioned at the forward end of the Boardwalk, while the stern will be taken up with the first amphitheater at sea, called the AquaTheater. The largest freshwater pool ever put on a cruise ship, the AquaTheater will offer passengers the chance to swim, take scuba lessons, and sun themselves on the surrounding tiered platforms during the day, but at night it transforms into a performance space for shows of acrobatics, synchronized swimming, water ballet, and professional high-diving, as well as "dancing fountain" shows synchronized to music and lights. Topping the Boardwalk space (literally) will be the first zipline at sea, sending passengers soaring nine decks above.

- **The Royal Promenade** will appear on *Oasis* as aboard the Voyager and Freedom ships—a strip of restaurants, bars, and other attractions opening onto a central, Main Street–like promenade. On *Oasis,* though, the Promenade will be sunlit, with the central section of its roof opening up to the upper Central Park neighborhood, and will also feature a mezzanine level that overlooks the main promenade below.

Other cool stuff includes two rock-climbing walls and the first **loft suites** at sea, offering luxury amenities and huge ocean views through floor-to-ceiling, double-height windows.

For her inaugural season, *Oasis* will sail from Fort Lauderdale on 19 consecutive 7-night eastern Caribbean cruises, visiting St. Thomas, St. Maarten, and Nassau. Starting in May 2010, *Oasis* will alternate its eastern Caribbean itinerary with a western Caribbean itinerary, calling at Labadee (Royal Caribbean's private beach in Haiti), Cozumel (Mexico), and either Costa Maya (Mexico) or, after November 2010, the new port of Falmouth (Jamaica). The cruise line has had to work with the government of Haiti to construct a dock at Labadee and also with Jamaica to create a terminal and pier at Falmouth, on the north coast, to improve port facilities in order to accommodate the huge number of passengers the ship will disgorge onto the islands.

including a dedicated teen Sun Deck. Newly expanded teen programming hours are daily 9am to 5pm and 7pm to 2am.

Slumber-party-style **group babysitting** for children 3 and up is available in the kids' playroom nightly between 10pm and 1am. The hourly charge is $6 per child (kids must be at least 3 years old and potty-trained). Private, in-cabin babysitting for kids 1 year and up is available from off-duty crewmembers 8am to 2am, and must be booked at least 24 hours in advance through the purser's desk; a new Fisher-Price partnership means the babysitter will arrive with Fisher-Price and Mattel toys and games, and play with your child. Upon parents' return, the sitter offers them a log of what they did together. The cost: $10 per hour for up to two siblings; $15 per hour for a maximum of three. The few hours of adult time to enjoy dinner, drinks, entertainment, a workout, and/or spa treatment: priceless.

Royal Caribbean Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Adventure	**Caribbean:** 7-night southern, r/t San Juan (Jan–Apr & Dec).
Allure	**Caribbean:** 7-night eastern & western, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Dec).
Enchantment	**Caribbean:** 7-night southern, r/t Colon, Panama (Jan–Apr). 9-night eastern, r/t Norfolk (May–Jun). 9-night eastern, r/t Baltimore (July–Aug & Oct–Nov). 12-night southern, r/t Baltimore (Dec). **Bermuda:** 5-night, r/t Norfolk (May–Jun), r/t Baltimore (Jun–Nov). **Canada/New England:** 8-night (Jun) & 9-night (Aug–Oct), both r/t Baltimore. **Bahamas:** 9-night, r/t Baltimore (Nov–Dec).
Explorer	**Caribbean:** 9-night eastern, r/t Bayonne, NJ (Feb–Mar & Nov–Dec). **Bermuda:** 5-night, r/t Bayonne, NJ (Apr–Oct). **Bermuda/Bahamas:** 9-night, r/t Bayonne, NJ (Apr–Aug). **Bermuda/Caribbean:** 9-night, r/t Bayonne, NJ (Apr–Aug). **Canada/New England:** 9-night, r/t Bayonne, NJ (Sept–Oct).
Freedom	**Caribbean:** 7-night eastern & western, r/t Port Canaveral (year-round).
Grandeur	**Caribbean:** 4- & 5-night western, r/t Tampa (Jan–Apr), r/t Fort Lauderdale (Apr–Oct). 7-night southern & western, r/t Colon, Panama (Nov–Dec).
Independence	**Caribbean:** 6-night western & 8-night eastern, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Jan–Apr).
Jewel	**Caribbean & Panama:** 9-, 10- & 11-night, r/t Miami (Jan–Apr). **Canada/New England:** 7-night, r/t Boston (Sept–Oct). **Caribbean:** 10- & 13-night, r/t Boston (Oct).
Liberty	**Caribbean:** 7-night western, r/t Miami (year-round). 7-night eastern, r/t Miami (May–Dec). **Bahamas:** 3-night, r/t Miami (Oct).
Majesty	**Bahamas**: 3- & 4-night, r/t Miami (year-round).
Mariner	**Mexican Riviera:** 7-night, r/t Los Angeles (year-round).
Monarch	**Bahamas:** 3- & 4-night, r/t Port Canaveral (year-round).
Navigator	**Caribbean:** 4- & 5-night western, r/t Miami (Jan–Apr & Nov–Dec).
Oasis	**Caribbean:** 7-night eastern (year-round) & 7-night western (May–Dec), both r/t Fort Lauderdale.
Radiance	**Mexican Riviera:** 9-night (Jan), 10- & 11-night (Jan–Apr), 7-night (Mar), & 5-night (May), all r/t San Diego. **Alaska:** 7-night Gulf of Alaska, north- & southbound between Vancouver & Seward/Anchorage (May–Sept). 13-night, San Diego to Vancouver (May). 14-night, Vancouver to San Diego (Sept). **Panama Canal:** 15-night, San Diego to Tampa (Sept). **Caribbean:** 4- & 5-night western (Oct–Dec) & 7-night western (Oct), all r/t Tampa.
Rhapsody	**Alaska:** 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Seattle (May–Sept). **Hawaii:** 10-night, Honolulu to Vancouver (Apr). 12-night, Vancouver to Honolulu (Sept).
Serenade	**Caribbean:** 7-night southern, r/t San Juan (year-round).
Voyager	**Caribbean:** 7-night western, r/t Galveston (Jan–Apr & Nov–Dec).

Alternatively, a revamped **Adventure Ocean dinner program** is a kind of "get out of parenting free" card for adults, inviting kids to have dinner with youth staff in the Windjammer Café, the Solarium, or Johnny Rockets diner (depending on the ship) from 6 to 7pm, then take part in an activities session until 10pm. This is offered on 3 nights of a 7-night cruise and once or twice on shorter cruises. A complete child's menu is offered. At midday on sea days, the new "Lunch and Play" program invites kids 3 to 11 to eat with counselors between noon and 2pm and enjoy movies, cartoons, and playtime (it's $7.95 per kid). New interactive kids' menus (parents, bring your own crayons, though—on our last cruises the dining staff didn't have any) have

Port Preview: Jamaica Rising

To make space for the *Oasis of the Seas*—after all, a ship of this size can't just fit in at any old pier—Royal Caribbean is building a new cruise ship terminal in Falmouth, on Jamaica's north coast. It's expected the pier and terminal (which includes shopping outlets) will be finished in late 2010, after which *Oasis*'s western Caribbean route will include calls at Labadee, Royal Caribbean's private beach in Haiti; Falmouth, Jamaica; and Cozumel, Mexico. The plan is for the design and experience to have an old-world style, along the lines of Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia. From Falmouth, convenient access to popular attractions includes rafting on the Martha Brae River, swimming with dolphins at Dolphin Cove, and nature excursions at Chukka Caribbean Adventure Tours.

just been introduced, offering more healthy options. Other new stuff includes a kids' section in the ships' libraries and for the suites, a Mattel board game menu, including Pictionary, Balderdash, and UNO Flash.

There is no minimum age for kids to sail with Royal Caribbean.

ENTERTAINMENT

RCI doesn't scrimp in the entertainment department, with music and comedy acts, some of the best Vegas-style shows at sea, passenger talent shows, **ballroom dancing competitions,** karaoke, sock hops, and occasional **"name" groups and soloists,** such as the Platters, the Drifters, the Coasters, John Davidson, and Marty Allen. Other names may not be as familiar, but can be pretty amazing, such as the Knudsen Brothers (aka "Six"), a six-member family a cappella group that mixes great harmonies, human-beat-box rhythms, and a lot of comedy about its male-pattern baldness. The newer the ship, the larger and more sophisticated the stage, sound, and lighting equipment, with some boasting a wall of video monitors to augment live performances.

Aside from its showrooms and huge glitzy casinos, Royal Caribbean is big on signature spaces, with each ship offering the nautical, woodsy **Schooner Bar** as well as the **Viking Crown Lounge,** an observation-cum-nightclub set high on a top deck and boasting panoramic views of the sea and ship in all directions. The Latin-themed **Bolero's bar** (aboard *Oasis, Freedom, Liberty, Independence, Navigator, Mariner, Monarch,* and *Majesty*) serves a mean mojito and has Latin music into the night. Atrium bars also feature live music, often classical trios.

SERVICE

In general, dining, bar, and cabin service are surprisingly good considering the sheer volume of passengers with which crewmembers must deal. At dinner on a recent cruise we found that even when staff was rushed our water glasses were always filled, wine orders were delivered promptly, and our servers always found time for a little friendly chitchat as they skated around their tables; though on this same cruise at lunchtime, crew seemed tired, grumpy, and struggling to keep up with demand (which was really high at lunch). Generally, though, crew is efficient and friendly,

whether it's a crewman polishing the brass or the guest service staff, which on our recent *Rhapsody* cruise was superpatient and very helpful. These folks work long, hard days, though, and on ships this size (and especially on those operating quick-turn-around 3- and 4-night cruises), it's possible to run into some crewmembers who look like *they* need a vacation.

Guests on Royal Caribbean have the option of **tipping** traditionally—giving tips as deserved to crew members on a one-to-one basis—or adding a pre-paid gratuity to their onboard accounts ($10 per day is suggested), to be divided among service staff later. Guests enrolled in the line's flexible My Time Dining program are required to pre-pay their gratuities.

Laundry and **dry-cleaning services** are available on all the ships, but none have self-service laundromats.

The Freedom Class: Freedom • Liberty • Independence of the Seas

Freedom of the Seas *(photo: RCCL)*

The Verdict

Supersized versions of the already-supersized Voyager-class ships, *Freedom, Liberty,* and *Independence* offer everything those ships do and more, though they come very close to being too big (and too commercial) for their own good.

Specifications

Size (in tons)	160,000	Year Launched	
Passengers (double occ.)	3,634	*Freedom*	2006
Passenger/Space Ratio	44	*Liberty*	2007
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	1,815/844	*Independence*	2008
Crew	1,360	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	N/A
Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.7 to 1		

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5) ★★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	4.5
Appearance & Upkeep	5	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	5
Public Comfort/Space	4.5	Children's Facilities	5
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	5

This trio is second only to *Oasis* in the category of largest passenger ships in the world, besting Cunard's *Queen Mary 2* by 9,000 gross register tons and 1,000-plus passengers. If you love supersizing your fries, shopping at Costco, and driving a Cadillac Escalade, then the giant size of these ships will likely knock your socks off. If you're the type who gets overwhelmed easily, think again.

The ships are, at essence, just larger versions of Royal Caribbean's popular 142,000-ton, 3,114-passenger Voyager-class ships (see later), which introduced the line's now-brandwide "active vacation" image with their rock-climbing walls, ice-skating rinks, and full-size basketball courts; the Freedom ships also sport some new stuff, namely a kids' water park and a surfing simulator. Extremely well designed, the Freedom vessels disperse their large complement of passengers among many interesting public areas—including the four-story, boulevard-like interior Royal Promenade, which runs more than a football field's length down the center of each ship and is lined with bars, shops, and entertainment lounges. The promenade, with its strollable, urban feel, makes the Freedom vessels a great compromise for couples who can't decide between a tropical cruise and a city vacation. They really do feel like "cities at sea."

The Freedom ships carry at least 500 more passengers (and more if all berths are full) and offer a nearly identical layout and ambience to the Voyager ships, but stretched out and with a few new eye-catching activities and entertainment features. But those extras come with a price: the Freedom ships' Royal Promenade, for instance, is more dominated by shops and corporate co-branding arrangements (a Ben & Jerry's ice-cream parlor, a sportswear shop with a dedicated New Balance section, and so on), giving it a feel that's as much mall as theme park. When crowds are low—say, during the early dinner seating, or late at night—it can still be a lot of fun to sit at the "sidewalk" cafe or bar and catch a drink, but when things are hopping, you'd be forgiven for thinking your car was parked outside, in lot D.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$98	152	yes	yes	no	yes
Outside	$119	161–189	yes	yes	some	yes
Suite	$230	287–1,406	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS Standard outside cabins are a livable if not overlarge 161 square feet, though standard insides seem small at 152 square feet. All cabins come with Internet dataports, minifridges, flat-panel TVs, safes, pleasant pastel color schemes, regular hair dryers, and supercomfortable beds. Bathrooms are on the cramped side, with little storage space, few amenities (soap and shampoo only), and only a thin sliver of counter. The cylindrical shower stalls, though definitely tight for large-size people, have RCI's standard sliding doors that keep the water and warmth in.

Of the 1,815 cabins, 1,084 have ocean views and 844 have verandas. Suites range from the affordable junior suites (with sitting area and balcony) to a handful of family suites (with two bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a living area with sofa bed) up to the huge Presidential Suite with its four bedrooms, four bathrooms, and 810-square-foot balcony.

For those who want an "urban" (aka voyeuristic) experience, the 168 atrium cabins on the second, third, and fourth levels of the four-story Royal Promenade have windows facing the action below, with curtains and soundproofing to keep most of the light and noise out, when you want downtime.

Thirty-two cabins are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS These ships have more than 3 miles of public corridors apiece, and it can feel like a real hike if your cabin's on one end of the ship and you have to get to the other. Running 445 feet down the center of Deck 5 is the bustling, four-story Royal Promenade, designed to resemble Memphis's Beale Street or New Orleans's Bourbon Street. Like those famous thoroughfares, it's lined with shops, bars, and cafes, and features evening musical performances by the ships' various musical groups, including their big bands. Other promenade attractions include a Ben & Jerry's ice-cream parlor, a coffee bar, a casual pizza-and-snacks restaurant, an English-style pub with evening entertainment, a champagne bar, a wine bar that offers tastings (see the "Public Areas" section in the Voyager-class review below for a detailed description), a small bookstore, several shops, and, for our money, the best thing on the whole strip: a men's barbershop offering old-timey professional shaves spiced with a helping of New Age spa frippery. The half-hour Express Shave includes hot towels, deep-cleansing exfoliation, a superclose shave, and did we mention hot towels? Niiiice. Only downside? They use safety razors instead of straight. Wimps.

Down on Decks 3 and 4, the two-level disco is entered through a theme-parky "secret passage." There are also a huge multistory theater, a casino with more than 300 slot machines, a Latin-themed bar with live music, and the nautically themed Schooner Bar. One deck down, excellent ice shows as well as game shows and fashion shows are held throughout each cruise at the Center Ice Rink, which has a sliding floor to cover the ice during nonskate events. Other public rooms include a library, an Internet center, a sprawling kids' area with huge oceanview playroom, a living-room-style teen center, a jumbo arcade, a top-deck jazz club and cocktail lounge, a card room, and a wedding chapel. There's also a "peek-a-boo" bridge that allows guests to watch the crew steering the ship.

DINING OPTIONS The ships' three-level main dining rooms are, like those on RCI's Voyager-class ships, among the most stunning and classy aboard any of today's megaships, with a design that follows a generally classical theme. Each level—linked by a large open area and grand staircase at its center—is considered a separate restaurant, though service and menus are consistent throughout. A pianist or piano trio entertains from a platform in the aft end of the room and a huge crystal chandelier hangs overhead, both setting an elegant mood.

Two alternative restaurants occupy spots immediately to port and starboard at the entrance to the buffet restaurant: Portofino, serving Italian meals in a cozy setting, and Chops Grille, a woodsy room for manly steaks. Portofino charges a $20 per person cover charge; for Chops, it's $25 per person. Out in the buffet, a section called Jade serves Japanese, Chinese, Indian, and Thai dishes.

Another casual option for lunch, dinner, and late-night snacks is the popular Johnny Rockets, a 1950s-style diner set out on deck and offering burgers, shakes, fries, and the like, with veggie burgers to satisfy nonmeat eaters. There's a nominal $4.95 per-person service charge, and sodas and shakes are a la carte.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES Sticking with their active image, Royal Caribbean has outfitted the Freedom ships with several features sure to entertain both actual athletes and weekend warriors, as well as their active kids. The

biggest hoo-ha is each ship's FlowRider surfing simulator—similar to swim-in-place lap pools with their recycling currents, except that this one features a stream that flows up an inclined, wedge-shaped surface 40 feet long and 32 feet wide. At the bottom are powerful jets that pump 30,000 gallons per minute up the slope, creating a wavelike flow on which boarders can ride—at least in theory. Located in the stern of each ship's sports court, spanning Decks 12 and 13, the ride is adjoined by bleachers for gawkers and fans, creating a bonding atmosphere where those who aren't inclined to flow can wager on those who are. We had our money on the kid with the puka beads and board shorts, who did manage to get to his knees before falling off and being swept up and *bam!* into the padded back bumper—just like everybody else. It's sports as a metaphor for life: Eventually, you fall down and get swept away by the currents, only here you can get back in line and try again. Participants must sign up for free group sessions and go through a quick introduction, after which they and the other members of their group take turns riding the wave, in either traditional stand-up surfing or less-balance-demanding body-boarding. A soft, flexible surface absorbs the impact when you fall. Which you will.

A free-standing "surf shack" bar near the FlowRider offers drinks. Also nearby are Royal Caribbean's signature rock-climbing wall (the biggest one at sea, naturally), a miniature-golf course, a golf simulator, a jogging track, and a full-size basketball court.

In the ship's gym, an honest-to-God 20×20-foot boxing ring takes the place of the large hot tub that greets guests on the Voyager ships. The ring is part of what the line bills as the largest fitness center at sea, offering an enormous number of aerobics and weight machines plus workouts (for a fee) that are rare even in shore-side gyms. Options include Fight Klub boxing training (one-on-one training sessions using speed bags, jump ropes, heavy bags, and padded punching mitts), personal training with Pilates instructors, onboard yoga and a class on the beach at Labadee (Royal Caribbean's private resort in Haiti), Boot Camp X-Treme Training, and linked treadmill workouts. Stretch and fitness tips are located at intervals along the onboard running track, and a program of mapped running/jogging routes is available in the ports of call.

On deck, the kid-friendly H2O Zone Water Park takes up almost half the Pool Deck, with water cannons, jets, buckets, and sprays hidden among colorful cartoon statues, some controlled by motion sensors, others by the kids themselves. The area also includes two wading pools (one geared to toddlers) and two hot tubs, a great place for mom and dad to soak while the kiddos are having a ball. Farther forward, the main pool area offers two pools (one traditional, one "sports") and two large hot tubs at port and starboard, extending 12 feet over the edge of the ship and some 112 feet above the sea. Extremely popular, they get socially crowded—but, of course, with hot tubs that's the point.

While crowds tend to disperse around the ships' public areas, on sunny days things can get very crowded out on the main Pool and Sports decks. Guests seeking something more peaceful can sometimes find it in the adjacent, adults-only Solarium, where a second swimming pool is bisected by a little bridge.

The Voyager Class: Voyager • Explorer • Adventure • Navigator • Mariner of the Seas

Explorer of the Seas *(photo: Matt Hannafin)*

The Verdict

Sports club meets Vegas meets theme park meets cruise ship, these enormous vessels are real winners if you like your vacations larger than life. As we overheard one little boy say to his father, "This doesn't look like a ship, daddy. It looks like a city!"

Specifications

Size (in tons)	142,000	Year Launched	
Passengers (double occ.)	3,114	*Voyager*	1999
Passenger/Space Ratio	45.6	*Explorer*	2000
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	1,557/757	*Adventure*	2001
Crew	1,176	*Navigator*	2002
Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.7 to 1	*Mariner*	2003
		Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	N/A

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

★★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	4.5
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	5
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	5
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	5

Truly groundbreaking when they were first launched, the Voyager-class ships are still among the largest and most activity-rich passenger ships at sea, boasting a full-size ice-skating rink; an outdoor in-line skating track; a 1950s-style diner sitting right out on deck; a 9-hole miniature-golf course and golf simulator; regulation-size basketball, paddleball, and volleyball courts; huge two-level gyms and spas; and the rock-climbing walls that have become one of Royal Caribbean's most distinguishing features. And did we mention they also have monumentally gorgeous three-story dining rooms, florist shops, and a "peek-a-boo" bridge on Deck 11 that allows guests to watch the crew steering the ship?

Great for people-watching, the four-story, boulevard-like Royal Promenade runs more than a football field's length down the center of each ship and is lined with bars, shops, and entertainment lounges and anchored at each end by huge twin atria. Voyeurs will be glad to know that three decks of inside cabins have views from bay windows of the "street scene" below.

Though each ship carries 3,114 guests at double occupancy (but because many staterooms have third and fourth berths, total capacity for each vessel can reach as high as 3,838), remarkably, the ships rarely feel as crowded as you'd expect. On our last three sailings, we found many public rooms nearly empty during the day and didn't have to wait in line much at all the entire week, even though more than 3,200 passengers were

aboard. As we heard one woman comment to her companion, "I know there are 3,000 people on this ship, but where are they all?" Kudos go to the crew for efficiency, and also to Royal Caribbean for a design that features enough appealing public areas to diffuse crowds comfortably, plus a layout that encourages traffic to flow in several different directions. This keeps crowding down and also means you don't tend to find yourself in the same spots day after day—it's entirely possible to be aboard for 6 days, turn a corner, and find yourself in a room you've never seen before. That said, when meeting up with family and friends around the ship, make sure you decide exactly where and when you're rendezvousing or chances are you won't see them for days!

One thing that deserves mention about ships this large is that even though ongoing maintenance is standard (replacing stained upholstery or carpeting, for instance), it's tough keeping up with the demands that constant use by thousands of passengers puts on the ship's soft goods especially. On one sailing aboard the *Voyager,* for instance, we noticed some work that hadn't yet been addressed (a torn curtain in the dining room and soiled fabric on some chairs).

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$77	160	yes	yes	no	yes
Outside	$81	161–328	yes	yes	some	yes
Suite	$101	277–1,325	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS Though not huge (at 160 sq. ft. for insides and 173 for standard ocean views, including balcony), Voyager-class cabins are comfortable, offering Internet dataports, minifridges, safes, TVs, pleasant pastel color schemes, and hair dryers. Bathrooms are on the cramped side, with little storage space, few amenities (soap and shampoo only), and only a thin sliver of counter. The cylindrical shower stalls, though definitely tight for large-size people, have good sliding doors that keep the water and warmth in.

Of the 1,557 cabins, 939 have ocean views and 757 have verandas. There's a single huge Penthouse Suite, 10 Owner's Suites, and 4 Royal Family Suites that accommodate a total of eight people with two bedrooms plus a living room with sofa bed and a pair of bathrooms. Smaller and cheaper family cabins sleep six, some on sofa beds. For voyeurs, the 138 atrium cabins on the second, third, and fourth levels of the four-story Royal Promenade have windows facing the action below, with curtains and soundproofing to keep most of the light and noise out when you want downtime.

Twenty-six cabins are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS Each ship has about 3 miles of public corridors, and it can feel like a real hike if your cabin's on one end of the ship and you have to get to the other. Running down the center of each is the bustling, four-story Royal Promenade; lined with shops, bars, and cafes, it's the center of onboard life. Other promenade attractions include an elegant champagne bar; a comfy English/Irish bar with "sidewalk" seating; a Ben & Jerry's ice-cream bar; shops; and a bright cafe that serves pizza, cookies, pastries, and coffee 24 hours a day. *Voyager, Explorer,* and *Adventure* also have a large sports bar that gets big, raucous crowds when games are broadcast (and puts out free hot dogs and nachos to keep them there), and an arcade stocked with classic 1980s video games. On *Navigator* and *Mariner,* those were scrapped in favor of Vintages Wine Bar, created in collaboration with the Mondavi, Beringer Blass, and Niebaum-Coppola wineries. Full of wood and leather, with terra-cotta floors,

attractive vineyard-themed lithographs, and a 600-bottle "cellar," the bars showcase more than 60 vintages. Prices are reasonable and guests can taste any variety before ordering. Classes in wine appreciation are held here throughout the week, and passengers can also stage their own tastings by ordering any of 13 special "wine flight" tasting menus, with selections grouped by taste profile, varietal, or region—for example, merlots, Australian wines, and so on.

In total, there are some 30 places aboard each ship to grab a drink, including the Viking Crown complex on the top deck, with its elegant jazz club and golf-themed 19th Hole bar; the dark, romantic, nautically themed Schooner Bar; and the clubby cigar bar, tucked away behind a dark door and hosting blackjack games on formal evenings. Aboard each ship, the futuristic or Gothic-dungeon-themed disco is entered through a theme-parky "secret passage," while the huge three-story showrooms occupy the opposite end of the kitsch spectrum: beautifully designed, with simple, elegant color schemes and truly lovely stage curtains—the one on *Adventure* decorated with peacock designs, the one on *Explorer* depicting a chorus of women standing under golden boughs amid a rain of leaves. Excellent ice shows as well as game shows and fashion shows are held throughout each cruise at the Center Ice Rink, which has a sliding floor to cover the ice during nonskate events. Open skating for passengers is scheduled throughout the week.

Each ship has a two-story library-cum-computer-room with about 18 computer stations and Web cams that allow you to send your picture as an electronic postcard. There are also sprawling kids' areas with huge oceanview playrooms, teen discos, and jumbo arcades.

The best spots for chilling out with a book during days at sea include the seaview Seven of Hearts card room and Cloud Nine Lounge on Deck 14. Those really wanting to get away from people can retreat up the curving stairway to Deck 15's Skylight Chapel, which gets almost no traffic and is even free of piped-in music. (It also lacks windows.)

DINING OPTIONS The three-level main dining rooms on these ships are among the most stunning aboard any of today's megaships, with designs that follow a general European theme. Each level—linked by a large open area and grand staircase at its center—is considered a separate restaurant, though service and menus are consistent throughout. A pianist or piano trio entertains from a platform in the aft end of the room and a huge crystal chandelier hangs overhead, both setting an elegant mood.

For a dining alternative, the oceanview Portofino restaurant serves Italian meals in a cozy setting (and at an additional $20-per-person charge), but be sure to reserve a table as soon as you get aboard, as they book up fast.

The pleasant, spacious Island Grill and Windjammer casual buffet restaurants are joined into one large space but have separate lines and stations to keep things moving. On *Navigator* and *Mariner,* this area also incorporates the Asian-themed Jade buffet. There's no outdoor seating per se, but the ship's main pool area is on the same deck, just outside the restaurants' entrances.

Another casual option for lunch, dinner, and late-night snacks is the popular Johnny Rockets, a 1950s-style diner set out on deck and offering burgers, shakes, fries, and the like, with veggie burgers to satisfy nonmeat eaters. The international waitstaff is cute enough in their '50s-style soda-jerk clothes, but we could do without the cutesy lip-sync-and-dance routines to songs such as "YMCA" and "Respect." There's a $4.95-per-person service charge and sodas and shakes are a la carte.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES Each ship has a large, well-equipped oceanview gym, though the arrangement of machines and the many pillars

throughout can make them feel tight when full. Each has a large indoor whirlpool and a huge aerobics studio (among the biggest on any ship), and their two-level spa complexes are among the largest and best accoutered at sea, with peaceful waiting areas where New Agey tropical-birdsong music induces total relaxation—until you get your bill.

While crowds tend to disperse around the ships' public areas, on sunny days things can get tight out on the main pool decks, where deck chairs are squeezed into every level of the multistoried, amphitheater-like decks. The vibe can be electric (or at least loud) when the pool band starts playing. Guests seeking something more peaceful can usually find it in the adjacent Solarium, with a second swimming pool and two enormous whirlpool tubs under a sliding roof. Behind the Johnny Rockets diner, *Voyager, Adventure,* and *Explorer* have a kids' pool area with a water slide, wading pool, hot tub for adults, and dozens of adorable half-size deck chairs for the kids. On *Navigator* and *Mariner* the area is reserved for teens, with deck chairs for sunbathing and an outdoor dance floor with sound and light systems. Deck 13 is the hub of sports action, with the much-touted rock-climbing wall, skating track, miniature-golf course, and basketball court. Appointments must be made to use the more popular options (especially the wall), but this is a good thing as it cuts down on lines.

The Radiance Class: Radiance • Serenade • Jewel of the Seas

Radiance of the Seas *(photo: RCCL)*

The Verdict

Royal Caribbean's most elegant vessels combine classic nautical profiles and interior decor with a lot of the fun and games of RCI's Voyager class, including rock climbing and miniature golf.

Specifications

Size (in tons)	90,090	Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.5 to 1
Passengers (double occ.)	2,100	Year Launched	
Passenger/Space Ratio	42.9	*Radiance*	2001
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	1,050/577	*Serenade*	2003
Crew	857	*Jewel*	2004
		Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	N/A

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

★★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	4.5
Appearance & Upkeep	5	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	5
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	4
Decor	5	Enjoyment Factor	5

These ships are just plain handsome, with some of the adventure features of their larger Voyager- and Freedom-class siblings, but a sleeker seagoing profile outside and a more nautical look and feel inside—and acres of windows to bring the two together.

And these ships are of more manageable size, too. When you first board, you'll see one of Royal Caribbean's typical wiry modern art sculptures filling the bright, nine-story atrium, but venture a little farther and you'll see that the ships have a much more traditional interior, with dark-wood paneling, caramel-brown leathers, and deep-sea-blue fabrics and carpeting. Some 110,000 square feet of glass cover about half of their sleek exteriors, offering wide-open views from the Viking Crown Lounge, Singapore Sling's piano bar, Crown & Anchor Lounge, Sky Bar, Windjammer Café, Champagne Bar, and even the atrium, which is an uninterrupted wall of glass from Decks 5 through 10 portside, and has four banks of glass elevators. All this transparency comes in handy in scenic destinations such as Alaska. Sister ship *Brilliance of the Seas* spends the year sailing out of Dubai to Middle Eastern ports and also in the Mediterranean.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$82	165	yes	yes	yes	yes
Outside	$100	170	yes	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$229	293–1,001	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS Cabins are fairly spacious, with the smallest insides measuring 165 square feet and some 75% of outside staterooms measuring at least 180 square feet, some with 40-square-foot verandas. The rest have jumbo-size portholes. Decor is appealing, done in attractive navy blues and copper tones. All cabins have minifridges, hair dryers, interactive televisions (for buying shore excursions, checking your onboard account, and looking up stock quotes), small sitting areas with minicouches, lots of drawer space, roomy closets, bedside reading lights, and TVs. Vanity/desks have pullout trays to accommodate laptops, plus modem jacks to connect them to the Internet. Bathrooms are small, with Royal Caribbean's typical hold-your-breath-and-step-in shower stalls, but they do have lots of storage space.

All but a handful of suites are located on Deck 10. The best, the Royal Suite, measures 1,001 square feet and has a separate bedroom, living room with baby grand piano, dining table, bar, entertainment center, and 215-square-foot balcony. Six Owner's Suites are about half that size, with 57-square-foot balconies, a separate living room, a bar, and a walk-in closet; and the 35 Grand Suites are one step below at 358 to 384 square feet, with sitting areas and 106-square-foot balconies. Three 586-square-foot Royal Family Suites have 140-square-foot balconies and two bathrooms and can accommodate six people in two separate bedrooms (one with third and fourth berths, and another two on a pullout couch in the living room). Suite guests are treated to complimentary in-cabin butler service in addition to cabin stewards, and there's also a Concierge Club on Deck 10, where suite guests can request services and grab a newspaper.

One snag on the balcony front: On each ship, Cabin Decks 7 through 10 are narrower than those on the rest of the ship, resulting in cabin balconies on Deck 10 (many of them suites) being shaded by the overhang of the deck above. Meanwhile, cabin balconies on the aft and forward ends of Deck 7, being indented, look out onto the top of Deck 6 instead of directly out onto the sea. Balconies on cabins 7652 to 7670 and 7152 to 7170, also aft on Deck 7, are not completely private because the dividers between them don't go all the way to the edge of the space. Keep your clothes on; your neighbors can look right over at you.

Fifteen cabins can accommodate wheelchair users.

PUBLIC AREAS Our favorite space aboard is the cluster of five intimate, wood-and-leather lounges on Deck 6, which recall the decor of classic yachts, university clubs, and cigar lounges. Expect low lighting, inlaid wood flooring, cozy couches, and Oriental-style area rugs. The best of these rooms is the romantic piano bar and lounge that stretches across each ship's stern, with a bank of floor-to-ceiling windows. For amazing views, don't miss having a cocktail here on a moonlit night. Adjacent is a lovely Colonial-style Billiard Club boasting herringbone wood floors, redwood veneer paneling, and a pair of ultra-high-tech gyroscopic pool tables. No excuse for missing shots: The tables compensate for the ship's movements, staying remarkably level.

The main theaters are refreshingly different from most in the cruise biz, with a cool ambience, warm wood tones, and seating in deep-sea blues and greens. Artful hand-made curtains, indirect lighting, and fiber optics all come together to create a quiet, ethereal look. But guys, watch those protruding armrests: It's very easy to snag your pants pockets on them.

Other public areas include the attractive Casino Royale, with more than 200 slot machines and dozens of gaming tables; a baseball-themed sports bar with interactive games on the bar top; the nautically themed Schooner Bar; a 24-hour Internet center; specialty-coffee bar with several Internet stations; a small library; a conference-center complex with a small movie theater; and, high up on Deck 13, Royal Caribbean's signature Viking Crown Lounge, which is divided between a quiet lounge and a large disco with a rotating bar. Even the ships' high-style public bathrooms are impressive, with their marble floors and counters and funky portholelike mirrors.

The huge kids' area on Deck 12 includes a sprawling playroom divided into several areas, with a video arcade and an outdoor pool with water slide. Teens have their own nightclub, with a DJ booth, music videos, and a soda bar.

DINING OPTIONS The two-story main dining rooms on all four ships are glamorous and elegant, like something out of a 1930s movie set. Four willowy silk-covered columns dominate the vaulted main floor, and a wide double staircase connects the two decks dramatically—all that's missing are Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr. On *Serenade,* painter Frank Troia's huge, Impressionist *Gala Suite* amplifies the mood, depicting formally dressed couples dancing amid floating globes of light.

The nautically decorated Windjammer Café takes self-serve buffet dining to new levels, with 11 food stations (9 inside and 2 outside) set up as islands to keep the lines down and the crowds diffused. It really works. If you prefer taking your meals while reclining, there's a small strip of cozy tables with oversize rattan chairs and thick cushions between the indoor and outdoor seating areas.

The cozy 90-seat Chops Grille is an oceanview venue with dark woods, rich upholsteries, and high-backed booths that bring home the meat-and-potatoes mood. You can watch your steak being cooked in the open kitchen. Adjacent is the 130-seat Portofino, an oceanview Italian restaurant. Expect more refined and gracious service than in the main dining room, plus a more leisurely pace (and a cost: Portofino charges a $20 per person cover charge; for Chops, it's $25 per person). Up on the Sport Deck, the Seaview Café is a casual lunch and dinner venue with checkered floors, rattan chairs, and lots of light, serving quick meals such as fish and chips, popcorn shrimp, and burgers.

A counter in the Solarium serves freshly made pizza by the slice, and a coffee shop offers cappuccino and pastries.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The Radiance vessels offer tons of recreation outlets and acres of space to flop on a deck chair and sunbathe. At the

main pool, passengers pack in like sardines on sunny days at sea, and deck chairs can be scarce during the prime hours before and after lunch—par for the cruise ship course. On *Radiance,* the Pool Deck is presided over by a 12-foot-high cedar totem pole carved for the ship by Alaska Native artist Nathan Jackson of Ketchikan.

Much more relaxing are the ships' large, lush Solariums, with their exotic eastern motifs. Tropical foliage and waterfalls impart an Asian-spa mood, and stone reliefs, regional woodcarvings, and statues drive home the mood. The area's adjacent (and popular) pizza counter adds a little pandemonium to the otherwise serene scene (as can kids, if they happen to find the place), but overall this is a great spot to settle in for a lazy afternoon at sea. The padded wooden chaise longues are heavenly. The adjacent spa has 13 treatment rooms and a special steam-room complex with heated tiled lounges and showers that simulate tropical rain and fog.

The Sports Deck has a 9-hole miniature-golf course and golf simulators, a jogging track, a rock-climbing wall attached to the funnel, and a combo basketball, volleyball, and paddle-tennis court. The sprawling oceanview gym has a huge aerobics floor and dozens of exercise machines, including sea-facing treadmills and elliptical stair-steppers.

The Vision Class: Legend • Splendour • Grandeur • Enchantment • Rhapsody • Vision of the Seas

The Verdict

These ships are glitzy and exciting without going overboard, though they're on the frumpy side compared to the newer, snazzier Radiance, Voyager, and Freedom ships.

Rhapsody of the Seas *(photo: RCCL)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)		*Grandeur*	975/212
Legend/Splendour	69,130	*Enchantment*	1,126/248
Grandeur	74,140	*Rhapsody/Vision*	1,000/229
Enchantment	80,700	Crew	
Rhapsody/Vision	78,491	*Legend/Splendour*	720
Passengers (double occ.)		*Grandeur*	760
Legend/Splendour	1,804	*Enchantment*	840
Grandeur	1,950	*Rhapsody/Vision*	765
Enchantment	2,252	Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.5 to 1
Rhapsody/Vision	2,000	*Enchantment*	2.7 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio		Year Launched	
Legend/Splendour	38.3	*Legend*	1995
Grandeur	38	*Splendour/Grandeur*	1996
Enchantment	35.8	*Enchantment/Rhapsody*	1997
Rhapsody/Vision	39.2	*Vision*	1998
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins		Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Legend/Splendour	902/231	*Enchantment*	2005

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5) ★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	3	Dining Options	3
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4
Public Comfort/Space	4	Children's Facilities	4
Decor	3.5	Enjoyment Factor	4

It's a funny thing with cruise ships. One year they're the newest, hottest, biggest thing on water, and just a few cycles around the sun later you look at them and think, "How quaint. How '90s." Still, they offer a decent cruise experience, but things have changed so fast in the cruise biz that even the best ships from the late 20th century can seem dated. That's sort of the story with RCI's Vision-class vessels, which offer an open, light-filled feel and many of the same amenities as aboard the line's newer, larger ships; and to us, their relatively smaller size is a big plus. You won't feel overwhelmed or lost on these ships.

All the ships have been kept up-to-date (they were even retrofitted with rock-climbing walls after those proved so popular on the Voyager ships), but *Enchantment of the Seas* is by far the most modernized of the bunch. In mid-2005, RCI revisited a trend common in the mid-'90s, literally sawing the ship in half like a magician's assistant, inserting a new 73-foot midsection, and then welding it all back together. As a result, *Enchantment* offers a lot more than her Vision-class sisters. On the much-enlarged Pool Deck there's an additional stage and midships bar for adults and an "interactive splash deck" with water jets kids can control to spray each other or create their own water ballet. Additions to the nearby Sports Deck include four bungee trampolines where guests can bounce up to 35 feet above the deck, doing somersaults in midair. Passengers with disabilities aren't left out, with new accessibility features including pool and Jacuzzi lifts, access to the Splash Deck, a lift to the bungee trampoline area, and improved thresholds and ramps throughout the vessel. Below-deck changes include the addition of a Latin-themed bar, an expanded casino, a larger shopping area, and a new coffee bar serving Seattle's Best coffee and Ben & Jerry's ice cream—features currently available aboard RCI's newer vessels. No word yet on whether *Enchantment*'s sister ships will get a similar refurbishment anytime soon.

Generally, when these ships are sailing full, things can feel crowded. On a recent *Rhapsody* sailing with just under 2,300 passengers, lunchtime in both restaurants was not a pretty sight. Getting on and off the ship in port can also be a hassle with so many people to move.

Splendour is sailing in Europe and South America at least through mid-2010.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$85	138–174	no	no	yes	yes
Outside	$106	154–237	some	no	yes	yes
Suite	$204	241–1,140	yes	no	yes	yes

CABINS To be polite, cabins are "compact"—larger than those on the line's older *Majesty* and *Monarch* but smaller than those on the Voyager- and Radiance-class ships and on many competitors' vessels. For big, check out the 1,140-square-foot Royal Suites, which feature a baby grand piano and huge marble bathroom with double sinks, a big whirlpool bathtub, and a glass-enclosed shower for two. For something in

between, check the roomy 190-square-foot category-D1 cabins, with private verandas, minifridges, small sitting areas with pullout couches, and tons of storage space. All told, about a quarter of each ship's cabins have private verandas, about a third can accommodate third and fourth passengers, and all have safes, TVs, and an impressive amount of storage space. Bathrooms are not the largest you'll ever see, with shower stalls that are a tight squeeze for anyone thicker than a supermodel. Expect an unmemorable decor with blond furniture and wood trim; on a recent *Legend* cruise, there were quite a few spots where the paint was peeling and on a recent *Splendour* sailing, the bathroom mirror was held together with a wide piece of electrical tape. Overall, the cabins have seen better days. On the bright side, carpeting and bedding are in good shape. In fact, duvets and super comfy bedding make sleeping a dream.

Each vessel has between 14 and 17 staterooms equipped for wheelchair users.

PUBLIC AREAS Throughout each vessel, warm woods and brass, gurgling fountains, green foliage, glass, crystal, and buttery leathers highlight the public areas, whose ambience ranges from classic to glitzy to a bit a dated. The bright, wide open, and easy-to-navigate Promenade and Mariner decks are home to most public rooms, their corridors converging at a seven-story atrium where glass elevators take passengers from Deck 4 all the way up to the glass-walled Viking Crown Lounge on Deck 11. Full musical revues are staged in glittery two-story showrooms, where columns obstruct views from some balcony seats. The ship's casinos are Vegas-style flashy, with hundreds of gambling stations so densely packed that it's sometimes difficult to move and always difficult to hear. Other nice spots include the Schooner piano bar (a great place for a pre-dinner drink or late-night unwinding, with a nautical wood-and-rope decor) and the Champagne Terrace at the foot of the atrium, where you can sip a glass of fine wine or bubbly while swaying to the two- or three-person band playing there.

In contrast to its showcase spaces, each ship also contains many hideaway refuges, including an array of cocktail bars, a card room, and a library, though not a very well stocked one. A couple thousand original artworks aboard each ship (including the good, the bad, and the weird) add humanity and warmth.

For kids, there's a decent playroom stocked with toys, books, and games, and nearby is a roomy teen center and a small video-game arcade.

DINING OPTIONS The large dining rooms aboard these vessels span two decks connected with a grand staircase and flanked with 20-foot walls of glass. The rooms are of their era, with lots of stainless steel, mirrors, dramatic chandeliers, and a bit of banquet-hall feel. At lunchtime on our recent *Rhapsody* cruise, the whole operation seemed disorganized—there was a long wait for tables and waiters seemed hassled to keep up. There's also a large indoor/outdoor buffet restaurant serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Again, on a recent *Rhapsody* sailing, the Windjammer buffet was a chaotic sea of humanity during lunchtime; it was hard to find a seat and crew seemed to struggle a bit keeping things tidy and bins filled. A small snack counter where pizza, sandwiches, and various salads are served can be a welcome respite from the frenetic Windjammer buffet at lunchtime.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The Steiner-managed spas on these ships offer a wide selection of treatments as well as the standard steam rooms and saunas. Adjacent Solariums offer a pool, lounge chairs, floor-to-ceiling windows, and a retractable glass ceiling for inclement weather. Designed after Roman, Egyptian, or Moorish models, these bright, spacious areas are a peaceful place to lounge before or

after a spa treatment, or any time at all (well, except during lunch and pre-dinner hours, when the snack bar in the corner attracts a following which takes away from the serenity of the space). Gyms are surprisingly small and cramped considering the ships' size.

Each ship has a higher-than-expected amount of open deck space. The outdoor pool on the Sun Deck has the usual blaring rah-rah music during the day, along with silly contests of the belly-flop variety. A rock-climbing wall, minigolf course (on the *Legend* and *Splendor*), jogging track, shuffleboard, and Ping-Pong round out the on-deck options.

Monarch of the Seas • Majesty of the Seas

The Verdict

This pair sure ain't spring chickens, but they are a bargain, sailing inexpensive 3- and 4-night cruises on the East and West coasts.

Majesty of the Seas *(photo: RCCL)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	73,941	Year Launched	
Passengers (double occ.)	2,390	*Monarch*	1991
Passenger/Space Ratio	30.9	*Majesty*	1992
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	1,177/62	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Crew	825	*Monarch*	2003
Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.9 to 1	*Majesty*	2007

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	3	Dining Options	3
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	3
Public Comfort/Space	3	Children's Facilities	4
Decor	3.5	Enjoyment Factor	3.5

Along with their predecessor *Sovereign of the Seas* (which now sails for Spain's Pullmantar Cruises), *Monarch* and *Majesty of the Seas* were once among the largest cruise ships in the world, but today they're literally less than half the size of their largest fleetmates. A decade and a half of hard use has given them their share of bumps and bruises, and even though recent makeovers have hammered out some of the dents and updated their look, expect well-worn and comfortable rather than sophisticated.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$56	120	no	no	no	yes
Outside	$65	120–157	some	no	some	yes
Suite	$178	264–670	yes	no	yes	yes

CABINS Standard staterooms are very snug at only 120 square feet, bathrooms are similarly cramped, and closet space is limited—but then, how much space do you need on the kind of short itineraries these ships offer? More than 100 cabins have upper and lower berths to accommodate four, albeit very tightly. Overall, cabin decor is spartan and uninspired, with pastel fabrics and blond woods, and like other ships of their generation, relatively few have balconies. All cabins have TVs and safes. Soundproofing in these cabins isn't the greatest; in some you can hear every word your neighbors say.

Four to six cabins on each ship can accommodate wheelchair users.

PUBLIC AREAS A dramatic five-story atrium is the focal point of each ship, separating the public areas (which are mostly clustered in the stern) from the cabins forward, an arrangement that minimizes bleed-through noise and also gives the impression that these ships are smaller than they are. Shops, the ship's salon, the Internet center, the library, several information desks, and a champagne bar are all clustered around the atrium at various levels. Elsewhere, you'll find a sprawling casino, a cinema, the popular Schooner piano bar, and (as on all pre-*Voyager* RCI ships) the Viking Crown Lounge, perched on the topmost deck some 150 feet above sea level and letting on to amazing panoramic views. It's a great place for a pre-dinner drink and after-dinner dancing. Down on Decks 5 and 7, the two-story main show lounge is roomy and well planned, with lots of cocktail-table-and-chair clusters for two and a huge stage.

As part of their makeovers in recent years, both ships were fitted with a Boleros Latin Lounge, featuring Latin music, a dueling-piano-players act, and drinks from Brazil, Cuba, and Central America. The ships' children's centers were also expanded and three teens-only hangouts added: the Living Room coffee bar, a disco called Fuel, and a private outdoor Sun Deck with dance floor.

DINING OPTIONS Each ship offers a pair of one-story dining rooms, plus a large indoor/outdoor buffet restaurant on Deck 11 serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner. *Monarch*'s buffet also offers an Asian option (for an extra charge), and *Majesty*'s features multiple self-service islands offering regional dishes from Asia, Latin America, the Mediterranean, the U.S., and elsewhere, plus a cooked-to-order pasta station, a carving station, a deli, and a soup-and-salad bar. You can also nosh at a dedicated pizzeria or grab a specialty coffee or a Ben & Jerry's ice cream from the Latté-tudes coffee shop. *Majesty* also features a '50s-style Johnny Rockets diner serving burgers and shakes (there's a $4.95 cover charge).

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The deck layout and two good-size swimming pools seem plenty spacious when they're empty, but the number of passengers who typically sail these short itineraries almost guarantees that they'll fill up, becoming a wall-to-wall carpet of people. That said, there are many patches of more isolated deck space all over each ship, from the quiet slices on the tiered aft decks to two levels of far-forward deck space.

The Sports Deck, up high in the stern, has Ping-Pong tables and a basketball court. The half-moon-shaped gym on Deck 10 is fairly spacious, with a wall of windows facing aft. Treadmills, stationary bikes, step machines, and free weights line the perimeter of the room, facing the sea, and the inner part of the room serves as the aerobics space. A smallish spa is adjacent.

Both ships sport Royal Caribbean's signature rock-climbing walls.

7

The Ultraluxury Lines

On these, the ritziest ships at sea, guests don't line up for a cone of frozen yogurt or a slice of pepperoni pizza en route to St. Thomas or Nassau. Instead, they sip a glass of '98 bordeaux with their *filet de boeuf* in truffle sauce while sailing to St. Barts. They order jumbo shrimp from the room-service menu and take indulgent baths in fancy marble bathrooms. There are no midnight buffets, dancing waiters, belly-flop contests, or many of the other typical cruise ship trappings, but instead doting service, spacious suites with walk-in closets, and an overall feeling of calmness and elegance. Delicious French, Italian, and Asian cuisine often rivals that of respected shore-side restaurants, and even if it's not quite what you find at a three-star Michelin joint, it's absolutely the best you'll find at sea, served in high style by gracious waiters who know their jobs. A full dinner can even be served in your cabin, if you like.

Ships in the luxury class range from small, boutique vessels such as *SeaDream 1* and *SeaDream II* (serving only 110 passengers each); through midsize ships like Silversea's 296-passenger *Silver Cloud* and 382-passenger *Silver Shadow;* and on up to more substantial vessels like Regent's 700-passenger *Mariner* and *Voyager* and Crystal's 1,000-passenger ships. Whatever their size, they all cater to discerning travelers who don't blink at paying top dollar to be pampered. Service is very personal, and staff will get to know your likes and dislikes early on. The onboard atmosphere is much like a private club, with guests trading tales of exotic travels and business conquests over drinks or dinner.

Entertainment and organized activities are both more dignified than on other ships and more limited. Guests tend to amuse themselves, enjoying cocktails and conversation in a piano bar, listening to singers or musicians, and maybe watching small-scale song-and-dance revues.

While the high-end lines offer discounts (especially during the recent economic crisis), they'll still cost two or three times as much as your typical mainstream cruise. Expect to pay at least $2,000 per person for a week in the Caribbean, and easily twice that or more if you opt for a large suite or cruise during the busiest times of the year. Many extras are often included in the cruise rates. For instance, all the lines in this chapter except Crystal provide free unlimited wine, liquor, and beverages, along with gratuities, a stocked minibar, and (with the exception of Regent) a complimentary shore excursion on most cruises. Crystal includes all soft drinks in its rates. Many of these lines also have other free perks the mainstream lines don't, from Godiva chocolates on your pillow on formal nights (Silversea) to cotton logo pj's (SeaDream), and high-end bathroom amenities from names such as Bulgari, Bronnely, Molton Brown, and Acqua di Parma.

Most people attracted to these types of cruises are sophisticated, wealthy, relatively social, and used to the finer things in life. Most are well traveled though not necessarily adventurous, and tend to stick to five-star experiences. These ships are not geared

Frommer's Ratings at a Glance: The Ultraluxury Lines

1 = poor **2** = fair **3** = good **4** = excellent **5** = outstanding

	Enjoyment Factor	Dining	Activities	Children's Program	Entertainment	Service	Worth the Money
Crystal	5	5	5	3	4	4	5
Regent Seven Seas	5	4	3	2	3	5	5
Seabourn	5	5	2	N/A*	2	4	4
SeaDream	5	4	4	N/A*	3	5	5
Silversea	5	5	3	N/A*	2	5	4

Note: Cruise lines have been graded on a curve that compares them only with the other lines in the ultraluxury category. See "How to Read the Ratings," in chapter 5, for a detailed explanation of the ratings methodology.
*An N/A rating for children's programs indicates that line has no such program.

to children, although aboard lines such as Crystal you might see 100 or more during holidays or school vacation months. Babysitting can often be arranged privately with an off-duty crewmember.

DRESS CODES With the exception of casual SeaDream, the luxury cruises are the most formal ones: For the main dining rooms, you need to bring a tux or dark suit and a sequined gown or cocktail dress for the two or three formal nights scheduled each week. Informal nights call for jackets (skip the tie if you want to; things are getting more casual even on the fancy ships) and smart dresses, skirts, or pantsuits for women. That said, like the rest of the industry, even the high-end lines are relaxing their dress codes, heading closer to SeaDream, which espouses a casual "no jackets required" policy during the entire cruise. All the ultraluxe lines now have casual dining venues, so if you just want to throw on a sundress (or polo shirt and chinos) and be done with it, you'll be fine.

1 Crystal Cruises

2049 Century Park E., Ste. 1400, Los Angeles, CA 90067. ✆ **888/799-4625** or 310/785-9300. Fax 310/785-0011. www.crystalcruises.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL Stylish and upbeat, Crystal provides top-shelf service and cuisine on ships large enough to have lots of outdoor deck space, generous fitness facilities, tons of activities, multiple restaurants, and more than half a dozen bars and entertainment venues. **Sails to:** Caribbean, Panama Canal, Mexican Riviera, Hawaii, Canada/New England (plus Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia/New Zealand, South Pacific, South America, transatlantic, world cruise).

THE EXPERIENCE Crystal has the only truly upscale large ships in the industry. Carrying 922 to 1,070 passengers, they aren't huge, but they're big enough to offer much more than their high-end peers. You won't feel hemmed in and you likely won't be twiddling your thumbs from lack of stimulation. Service is excellent and the line's Asian cuisine is tops. Unlike Seabourn's small ships, which tend to be more calm and staid, Crystal's sociable California ethic and large passenger capacity tend to keep

things mingled, chatty, and more active. No question, these vessels have a vitality and energy the smaller Seabourn, Regent, and Silversea ships definitely do not.

Pros

- **Four or five restaurants:** In addition to the formal dining room, there are three alternative restaurants (including two on each with cuisine by famed chef Nobu Matsuhisa), plus a poolside grill, an indoor cafe, and a casual restaurant that puts on great theme luncheon buffets.
- **Best Asian food at sea:** The ships' reservations-only Asian restaurants serve up utterly delicious Japanese food, including sushi. At least once per cruise, an Asian-theme buffet lunch consists of an awesome spread.
- **Fitness choices:** There is a nice-size gym, along with paddle-tennis courts, shuffleboard, Ping-Pong, a jogging circuit, golf-driving nets, and a putting green. The line also features "Tour de Spin" indoor cycling classes and state-of-the-art Kinesis cable resistance equipment.
- **Enrichment programs:** No other line has as many, with four or five impressive lecturers as well as complimentary computer training classes on every cruise, plus dozens of theme sailings focused on food and wine, art, film, jazz, wellness, and other subjects.

Cons

- **Least all-inclusive of the luxe lines:** Only nonalcoholic drinks are included in the rates, not tips, booze, and so on.
- **Cabin size:** Accommodations (especially on *Symphony*) are smaller than those aboard Silversea, Seabourn, and Regent.

CRYSTAL: SPARKLING & SPACIOUS

Established in 1990, Crystal Cruises has established its own unique place in the high-stakes, superupscale cruise market. Its ships are the largest true luxury vessels in the category, and while not quite as generous as some other lines in the stateroom department (rooms are smaller than those on Regent, Silversea, and Seabourn) and the freebies department (Crystal doesn't include complimentary champagne, liquor, and wine in the rates, though cruise fares tend to be less expensive than the other lines that do), they provide a truly refined cruise for discerning guests who appreciate really good service and top-notch cuisine. No doubt about it, Crystal is one of our favorite lines.

The line is the North American division of Japan's largest container shipping enterprise, Nippon Yusen Kaisha (NYK). Despite these origins, a guest aboard Crystal

Compared with the other ultraluxury lines, here's how Crystal rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor					✓
Dining					✓
Activities					✓
Children's Program				✓	
Entertainment				✓	
Service				✓	
Worth the Money					✓

could conceivably spend an entire week at sea and not even be aware that the ship is Japanese owned and funded. More than anything else, Crystal is international, with a strong emphasis on European service. The Japanese exposure is subtler, and you'll feel it in the excellent Asian cuisine and tasty sake served in the alternative restaurants and at the Asian-theme buffets. A Japanese activities director is on board to attend to the handful of Japanese you'll see on many cruises.

PASSENGER PROFILE

Like other high-end lines, Crystal draws a lot of repeaters. On many cruises, more than 50% hail from affluent regions of California, and many are Crystal fans who have sailed with the line numerous times. There's commonly a small contingent of guests (about 15% of the mix) from the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, Mexico, Europe, South America, and other places. Most are well-heeled couples over 55. A good number step up to Crystal from lines such as Princess and Holland America.

Many Crystal guests place great emphasis on the social scene before, during, and after mealtimes, and many enjoy dressing up (sometimes way up) for dinner. You'll see no shortage of diamonds and gold Rolexes, and it's obvious that women on board have devoted much care and attention to their wardrobes and accessories. The onboard jewelry and clothing boutiques also do a brisk business, and a guest forking over $50,000 for a diamond-encrusted watch isn't uncommon. On formal nights—two or three of which occur during every 10- or 11-day cruise—the majority of men wear tuxes and many women wear floor-length gowns, although your classic black cocktail dress is just fine. As on all ships, dress codes are much more relaxed during the day.

Though not a kid-centric line compared to the mainstream lines, in the high-end ships, Crystal is the most accommodating for families with kids. Each ship has a dedicated playroom called Fantasia, a teen club, and supervised activities are held for ages 3 and up when demand warrants it. During holidays and the summer holiday months of July and August, 100 or so kids on board is not that unusual. Junior activities directors are on board during these cruises to organize dedicated programming for children.

DINING

Service by the team of ultraprofessional, gracious, European waiters is excellent. In the main dining room—and to a somewhat lesser degree in the alternative restaurants—table settings are lavish and include heavy leaded crystal, Frette linens, and Villeroy & Boch as well as Wedgwood china. Even in the Lido restaurant, waiters are at hand to serve you salad from the buffet line, prepare your coffee, and then carry your tray to wherever you want to sit.

TRADITIONAL Dinner is served in two seatings in the main dining rooms; at lunch and breakfast, there is open seating. Cuisine selections include dishes such as *coq au vin* (braised chicken in burgundy-red-wine sauce with glazed onions and mushrooms over a bed of linguine); Black Angus beef tenderloin with burgundy-wine gravy; oven-baked quail with porcini-mushroom-and-bread stuffing; or seared sea scallops served with a light lobster beurre blanc over a bed of risotto. At lunch and dinner, there's a **light, low-cholesterol selection** such as grilled fresh halibut served with steamed vegetables and herbed potatoes, as well as an entree salad—for example, a mixed salad with grilled herb-marinated chicken breast, lamb, or filet mignon. **Vegetarian selections,** such as spinach and ricotta cannelloni or a brochette of Mediterranean vegetables, are

also featured, as are **kosher foods** and **low-carb choices. Sugar-free, gluten-free,** and **low-fat options** are now part of all menus, too, even at buffets. Virtually any special diet can be accommodated.

In a kind of homage to the California wine industry, Crystal has one of the most sophisticated inventories of **California wines** on the high seas, as well as a reserve list of more than two dozen rare wines and an extensive selection of French wines. In 2004, the line also created its own proprietary label called **C Wines:** six chardonnays, cabernet sauvignons, and merlots made in limited production with grapes from the Napa and Sonoma valleys, Arroyo Seco, and the Santa Lucia Highlands. All are available on board by the glass or the bottle.

SPECIALTY The line's Asian dining spots are among the best at sea. Master chef **Nobuyuki "Nobu" Matsuhisa,** known for his restaurants in New York, Miami, L.A., London, Paris, and other cities, partnered with Crystal to create menus for both ships' Pan-Asian restaurant **Silk Road** and the **Sushi Bar.** Dishes feature Nobu's eclectic blend of Japanese cuisine with Peruvian and European influences. In the Sushi Bar, sample the salmon tartare with sevruga caviar or the yellowtail sashimi with jalapeño; in Silk Road, choices include lobster with truffle yuzu sauce and chicken with teriyaki balsamic. While Nobu himself makes occasional appearances, chef Toshiaki Tamba, personally trained by Nobu, oversees the restaurants.

Aboard both ships, famed restaurateur Piero Selvaggio showcases the cuisine of his award-winning Santa Monica and Las Vegas Valentino restaurants at the Italian **Valentino at Prego,** a colorful place with a Venetian flair. The best dishes we sampled on a recent *Symphony* cruise were the king crabmeat salad with fresh pear and aged balsamic, and the linguine with lobster tail, zucchini, and spicy tomato sauce. The only sour note: We could hear someone jogging on the track on the deck above during dinner.

Reservations are required for each of the specialty restaurants, which are complimentary aside from a suggested $7 gratuity. It's an amazing price for such great dining experiences.

CASUAL Excellent **themed luncheon buffets**—Asian, Mediterranean, Western barbecue, or South American/Cuban, for instance—are generously spread out at lunchtime by the pool, and an extraspecial **gala buffet** is put on once per cruise in the lobby/atrium. No expense or effort is spared to produce elaborate food fests, with heaps of jumbo shrimp, homemade sushi, Greek salads, shish kabobs, beef satay, stir-fry dishes, gourmet cheeses, and more.

While you can have breakfast in the **Lido Café,** the **Bistro Café** serves a late continental breakfast from 9:30 to 11:30am and is open between 11:30am and 6pm for complimentary grazing at the buffet-style spread of cheeses, cold cuts, fruit, cookies, and pastries; on a recent cruise, Heidi had an absolutely delicious Portuguese custard here and she still talks about it. Nonalcoholic specialty drinks, such as hazelnut latte and fruit shakes, are complimentary here. The Bistro tends to be a real social hub and people-watching spot.

For something casual poolside, the **Trident Grill** serves casual lunches daily between 11:30am and 6pm for those who'd like something simple and easy poolside (beef, chicken, and salmon burgers; wraps and tuna melts; pizza, hot dogs, and fries; fruit; and a special of the day). You can place your order at the counter and either have a seat at the adjacent tables or head back to your deck chair and let a waiter bring your

lunch. You don't even have to change out of your bathing suit. The grill also operates several evenings per cruise between 6 and 9pm, providing an open-air ambience and serving dishes such as grilled shrimp, Cobb salad, and gourmet pizza.

SNACKS & EXTRAS For **afternoon tea—**with live music, of course—it's the ultrachic **Palm Court** on one of the uppermost decks. A sprawling space with floor-to-ceiling windows and pale-blue-and-white furniture in leather and rattan, the area has a light, ethereal ambience. Pre-dinner and midnight hot and cold canapés in the lounges include delicious foie gras, caviar, and marinated salmon.

There is, of course, **24-hour room service,** as well as free unlimited nonalcoholic drinks everywhere aboard, from cappuccino to soda and bottled water.

ACTIVITIES

Crystal has an interesting selection of activities, most of which are part of the ships' **Creative Learning Institute.** The extensive program features an array of expert speakers, plus alliances with well-known organizations, schools, and brands—Yamaha for music classes, Berlitz for language classes, The Cleveland Clinic for health topics, and the Tai Chi Cultural Center, to name a few—to provide an even greater authority to the classes. You can count on several **enrichment lectures** throughout each cruise, such as a historian presenting a slide show and speaking about the Panama Canal and how it was built, a former ambassador or two speaking about regional politics, or a scientist talking about conservation. Most speakers are not celebrities, but well-known personalities do occasionally show up. Guests have included political commentators James Carville and Mary Matalin, songwriter Neil Sedaka, business consultant Ken Blanchard, former press secretary Marlin Fitzwater, medical expert Dr. Art Ulene, biographer Chris Ogden, publisher Steve Forbes, chef Andre Soltner, TV personality Monty Hall, journalist Jane Bryant Quinn, and singer Clint Holmes.

In addition to each cruise's guest lecturers, some of Crystal's sailings have "Experiences of Discovery" theme programs with activities built around them. More than a dozen annual Wine & Food Festival cruises feature a respected wine expert who conducts at least two complimentary tastings, plus guest chefs conducting cooking demonstrations for guests and then presenting the results of those lessons at dinner. There are also music-theme cruises from time to time, featuring big bands, ballroom dancing, jazz singers, and film and theater presentations. Other cruises have experts conducting seminars on finance issues, language, and art appreciation, the latter with speakers from the famous auction house Sotheby's. Mind, Body & Spirit cruises offer a focus on health and wellness, while golf cruises allow guests to play at some of the world's most exclusive courses.

Guest teachers teach swing, tango, and jive dance lessons on some cruises. Group lessons are complimentary, and private lessons can sometimes be arranged with the instructors for about $50 per hour per couple. Other activities include bridge and paddle-tennis competitions; game-show-style contests; trivia games; midafternoon dance music with the resident dance trio or quartet; interesting arts and crafts such as glass etching; and even guest fashion shows. Commonly, a **golf expert** sails on board, too, conducting complimentary group golf lessons by the driving nets several times per cruise (again, private lessons can be arranged; prices start at $50 per hr.). A variety of free aerobics classes are held in the fitness center, including Pilates and yoga (private personal trainers are available for a fee).

Crystal Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Serenity	**Caribbean:** 7-night eastern, r/t Miami (Jan). 10- & 14-night eastern, r/t Miami (Dec).
Symphony	**Caribbean & Panama Canal:** 11-night south- & northbound between Miami and Caldera, Costa Rica (Jan–Feb). **Panama Canal:** 14-night Miami to Los Angeles (Feb). 19-night New York to Los Angeles (Nov). **Canada/New England:** 11-night, north- & southbound between New York and Montréal (Sept–Oct). **Hawaii:** 14-night, r/t Los Angeles (Dec).

The line's **Computer University @ Sea** offers some free courses on all cruises, with topics such as basic computing, understanding the Internet, website design, and creating spreadsheets using Excel. Private lessons are also available for $50 an hour. Internet centers, which have the best support staffs of any cruise liner we've been on, have about 30 workstations apiece, featuring Dell PCs; however, you must buy Internet time in 2-hour $50 installments—not convenient if you just need a few minutes to send e-mail toward the end of the cruise. There are now Wi-Fi hotspots for those who want to work on their own laptops, along with onboard cellphone service via a satellite link, at prices in the same range as your provider's regular roaming charges.

With all this activity, on past sailings we've always run out of days before actually getting to do everything.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

Crystal is a sophisticated cruise line that focuses its attention on adults, but more than any other line in the luxury end of the market, it also does its part to cater to the little people. Each ship has a bright **children's playroom,** primarily used during holiday and summer cruises (mostly in Europe), when some 100 kids may be aboard. Both ships also have another room with PlayStations, computers, and arcade machines for older kids and teens, with counselors on hand to supervise activities such as scavenger hunts, arts and crafts, karaoke, and games that take place during several hours in both the morning and afternoon, for three age groups between 3 and 17. There are kiddie books and videos in the library for guests to take back to their staterooms, and a children's menu in the main dining room, as well as kid favorites at the poolside Trident Grill.

For children as young as 6 months, **in-cabin babysitting** can be arranged privately through the concierge at an hourly rate of $7.50 for one child, $10 for two kids, and $15 for three kids. Cribs, highchairs, and booster seats are available. As for food, if you notify the line ahead of time, it'll special order jars of baby food at no charge, or the chef will puree organic food for your baby. Note that children 11 and under pay 50% of the lowest adult fare when accompanied by two full-fare guests.

The minimum age for sailing is 6 months.

ENTERTAINMENT

Onboard entertainment is well produced. Shows in the horseshoe-shaped, rather plain **Galaxy Lounge** encompass everything from classical concertos by accomplished pianists to comedy to tired Broadway-style medleys, ventriloquists, and magic acts. The bright spot on a recent cruise was definitely the a cappella group that roamed the ship. Four young, talented hotties performed both impromptu and scheduled concerts in the atrium and other entertainment lounges, and also ran a few of the karaoke nights. A cappella singers are typically featured on longer cruises of 10+ nights. From

time to time, there's a featured celebrity entertainer aboard, such as the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, Maureen McGovern, Tommy Tune, or Marvin Hamlisch.

After dinner each night, a second large, attractive lounge is the venue for **ballroom-style dancing** to a live band, with a clutch of gentleman hosts aboard each sailing to provide dance (and dinner) partners for single ladies. Both ships have spacious **casinos** and rooms for dancing, in either *Serenity*'s dedicated nightclub or *Symphony*'s Starlight lounge. A pianist in the dark, paneled, and romantic **Avenue Saloon**—our favorite room on board—plays standards, show tunes, and pop hits before and after dinner. On both ships, you can also enjoy cigars (from Monte Cristo to Davidoff) in the **Connoisseur Club,** recent-release movies several times a day in the theater (where lectures and religious services are also held), and a varied and full menu of movies on the in-cabin TVs.

SERVICE

The hallmark of a high-end cruise such as Crystal is its service, so the line's staff is better trained and more attentive than those aboard most other cruise lines. Dining room and restaurant staffs hail from Italy, Portugal, and other European countries, and have trained in the grand restaurants of Europe and North America; the stewardess who tidies your stateroom is likely to be from Scandinavia, Hungary, or elsewhere in the E.U. Everyone, from the dining/bar staff to those at the information and concierge desks in the lobby, is endlessly good natured and very helpful. Guests in Penthouse Suites are treated to the services of male butlers. As far as tipping goes, most passengers charge gratuities to their onboard accounts, though you can pay in cash if you wish.

All guests get complimentary unlimited nonalcoholic drinks everywhere aboard, from cappuccino to soda and bottled water.

In addition to laundry and dry-cleaning services, complimentary **self-serve laundry rooms** are available.

Crystal Serenity

The Verdict

Crystal Serenity is Crystal's best, largest, and newest ship, offering an ultra-elegant cruise with a huge array of onboard choices, from dining to activities and public spaces.

Crystal Serenity *(photo: Crystal Cruises)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	68,870	Crew	655
Passengers (double occ.)	1,070	Passenger/Crew Ratio	1.6 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio	64.1	Year Launched	2003
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	535/460	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	2008

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5) ★★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4.5	Dining Options	5
Appearance & Upkeep	5	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	5
Public Comfort/Space	4.5	Children's Facilities	3.5
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	5

The largest truly ultraluxe vessel afloat, *Serenity* is 38% bigger than the older *Symphony,* but carries only 15% more guests. It's one of the most spacious ships out there, from its beautifully designed public rooms to the expansive Pool Deck. There's simply no crowding at any time. And with many refurbishments and improvements made in late 2008, this ship continues to shine.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Outside	$330	226	yes	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$761	403–1,345*	yes	yes	yes	yes

** Including veranda*

CABINS Standard staterooms on this ship are somewhat bigger than those on *Symphony,* and the bathrooms and balconies are larger. The majority of standard cabins (categories A and B) are 226 square feet, not including balconies; even with this increase, cabin size is not Crystal's strong suit when compared to the line's luxury peers. There are 100 suites in three different categories, with the largest running 1,345 square feet. The 2008 refurbishment added eight more Penthouses by eliminating 16 Deluxe Staterooms.

Most of the standard cabins, called Deluxe Staterooms, have a veranda, while 70 rooms have a large picture window. All feature a seating area, complimentary soft drinks and water, TV and DVD, small fridge, computer dataport, Egyptian cotton sheets and feather bed toppers, and a pillow menu. Choose from "regular" king- and standard-size pillows or four specialty options, which include round, foam-filled neck pillows for neck or lumbar support. Besides all of this, Penthouse Staterooms toss in butler service and free beer, while the Penthouse Suites also throw in complimentary liquor and wine setup at embarkation, a flatscreen TV, a separate bedroom area with a vanity, a Jacuzzi tub, a bidet, and a walk-in closet. If you're going straight to the top, the ship's Crystal Penthouses are incredibly spacious abodes, with a separate living room, a dining area, a CD player, three TVs (one in the bathroom, if that floats your boat!), a cordless phone, a library, a pantry, and, believe it or not, a small gym.

Decor-wise, wood accents and furniture in the staterooms are on the medium to dark side, creating an elegant atmosphere offsetting the more colorful curtains, wall coverings, upholstery, and bedcovers. The feel is soothing. As aboard *Symphony,* the bathrooms are nicely laid out, but still on the small side for a ship of such high quality. You'll find plenty of drawer and closet space for a cruise of up to about 2 weeks.

Only a handful of cabins have a third berth available, and none offers four berths. Eight rooms are designated as wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS Public rooms on the *Serenity* are all so appealing that it's difficult to pick a favorite. The ship has such a quiet, elegant atmosphere throughout that you won't even find glitz in the casino. Color schemes are muted and calming, with lots of blues, greens, reds, golds, and grays. As aboard *Symphony,* one of the most popular lounges is dark and cozy **Avenue Saloon,** with its wonderful round bar and plenty of table seating. The two show lounges, **Galaxy Lounge** and **Stardust Club,** have great sightlines and comfy seating, both theater- and table-style. The lobby bar has been redesigned making the whole area more enjoyable for daytime or evening drinks.

The ship has a good **library** that's well stocked with books, DVDs, and CDs that can be checked out only when the librarian is on duty. Two large rooms are dedicated to the line's learning programs: one for computer instruction and the other for classes offered in partnership with well-known institutions, such as piano instruction by Yamaha, language immersion by Berlitz, art classes conducted by the Parsons School of Design, and wellness programs run by the Cleveland Clinic and the Tai Chi Cultural Center. The newly refurbished casino, reflecting the end of the line's association with Caesars Palace, features a gorgeous gold, purple, and magenta color palette.

DINING OPTIONS Fine dining has been a trademark of Crystal's since the line began sailing in 1990, and the *Serenity* carries on the tradition with its two impressive alternative, open-seating specialty restaurants, both of which require reservations (and a suggested $7 cover charge). In **Prego,** the surroundings make you feel as if you're really in a fine Italian restaurant ashore, with meat, pasta, and fish dishes served a la carte or through a tasting menu with items selected by Piero Selvaggio, proprietor of the Valentino restaurants in Santa Monica and Las Vegas (the tableside prep of the carpaccio is worth the price of entry). On the Asian side of things, famed chef Nobu Matsuhisa oversees the menus in **Silk Road,** an ultrastylish space designed in a sea of ethereal shades of mint green and white, with seating available at tables or at the sushi bar (go early for a sushi snack, have a drink, and then go to late-seating dinner). Just forward of Silk Road, the **Vintage Room** is an intimate, boardroom-style wine cellar that hosts special wine- and champagne-themed dinners and other events. In the ship's formal restaurant, the **Crystal Dining Room,** there are two seatings at assigned tables each evening. The lovely decor is a rich blend of dark woods with blue-and-mauve chairs. The latest dining option on board is **Tastes,** a casual eatery serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner under a retractable roof near the Neptune Pool. It has a completely separate menu from the other dining areas and is a great dinner alternative when you don't feel like dressing up.

Other dining outlets include the Bistro Café, open for a variety of snacks and beverages all day long; the poolside Trident Grill; and the Lido Café, which serves buffet-style breakfast and lunch, with some made-to-order specialties such as omelets and pastas.

The 24-hour room-service menu is quite extensive. During dining hours, guests can also order from the Crystal Dining Room menu for in-cabin delivery.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES There are two reasonably sized pools, one of which features a sliding glass roof. Indoors, the stunning **Crystal Spa** was designed according to feng shui principles, putting you right into relaxation mode. The complex includes a quiet room with very comfortable seating and great aft-facing views for those relaxing moments before or after a spa treatment. The changing rooms are stocked with lotions, shampoos, hair dryers, clocks, and bottles of water, while the steam rooms have large picture windows for great views while you roast. A wide range of treatments includes a handful geared to men, such as a pro-collagen shave, frangipani hair conditioning, and aroma stone therapy massage. There's also a spacious salon and a gym with a separate weight room, aerobics studio, two full-size paddle-tennis courts, table tennis, golf driving nets, and a putting green.

Crystal Symphony

The Verdict

A gracious, floating pleasure palace, small enough to feel intimate and personal, yet large enough for a whole range of entertainment, dining, and fitness diversions.

Crystal Symphony *(photo: Crystal Cruises)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	51,044	Crew	545
Passengers (double occ.)	922	Passenger/Crew Ratio	1.7 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio	55.4	Year Launched	1995
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	480/276	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	2006

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5) ★★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	5
Appearance & Upkeep	5	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	5
Public Comfort/Space	4.5	Children's Facilities	3.5
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	5

The *Symphony* is one of the most spacious vessels we've ever been on, though its staterooms are not impressively large (they're pleasant, but smallish); but its public spaces are so open, generous, and sweeping compared to the smaller Seabourn, SeaDream, and Silversea ships, Crystal's luxury peers. You'll never feel hemmed in, even when the ship is sailing full. In late 2006, she had a major overhaul, to the tune of $23 million, resulting in a more contemporary look—goodbye brass, chrome, and prissy pastels! Staterooms and bathrooms were refurbished, along with entertainment lounges, the casino, boutiques, and more.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Outside	$268	198–215	yes	yes	yes	yes
Suite	$721	287–782	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS Though the majority of *Symphony*'s cabins are smaller than those aboard competing luxe lines Silversea, Regent, and Seabourn, they're still quite comfortable and were completely redone in late 2006. Cabins are decorated in shades of mauve, burgundy, rose, and light wood tones and accented with Murano glass bedside lamps, Rubelli fabrics, and leather headboards. Starting at 202 square feet (plus 48-sq.-ft. verandas on many), their one fault is their size. They're about 30% smaller than the standard staterooms on the Silversea, Regent, and Seabourn ships; booking a room with a balcony is a good idea for the additional space and light it provides. Otherwise, rooms are well designed. Standard amenities include a 20-inch LCD flatscreen TV, VCR, LED reading lights, and a stocked minibar; bottled water and sodas are free, but

booze isn't. The single closet with a sliding door isn't overly large and it may be a challenge getting all of your stuff in there if you're on a long cruise of 2 weeks or more. The small bathrooms were redesigned and now feel a bit more spacious; each has both a shower and bathtub (a short little one in the lower category cabins) and a pair of trendy oval glass sinks over granite countertops. Egyptian cotton sheets, feather bed toppers, and a choice of pillows make sleeping a dream. Deck 10 holds the ship's penthouses, the best of which measure more than 750 square feet, with nearly 200-square-foot balconies, full-fledged oceanview Jacuzzis in their living rooms, dark-wood furniture, and sofas upholstered in silk and satin, plus Oriental rugs and entertainment centers. A butler is part of the package.

Cabins without verandas have large rectangular windows. The category E cabins located midships on Decks 7 and 8 have views obstructed by lifeboats. There are no inside cabins.

Five cabins are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS The spacious atrium and main lobby area is a central meeting point and elegant shops wrap around the second tier. The adjacent **Bistro** coffee and snack cafe is open to the atrium and is the place to see and be seen; it's the ship's social heart. Overall, the *Symphony*'s decor incorporates everything from standard cruise ship marble, glass, chrome, and mirrors, to old-world dark-wood paneling and funky touches like aluminum.

Aside from the several bar/entertainment lounges, a roaming staff wanders the public areas throughout the day and much of the night, offering to bring drinks to wherever you happen to be sitting. The dark **Avenue Saloon,** where polished mahogany, well-maintained leather upholstery, and a live pianist draw passengers in, is one of the prime before- and after-dinner cocktail spots and our personal favorite, by far. There are also two large entertainment lounges, including a completely re-created venue called the **Starlite Club** that's used for lectures by day and dancing by night (though if you're there for a lecture, avoid seating in the back of the room; the noise from passersby looking at mug shots in the adjacent photo gallery is a distraction). The hub has a dramatic round bar and walls of sparkling Swarovski crystals. You'll find a large theater for movies and slide lectures, and a hushed library outfitted with comfortably upholstered chairs and a worthy collection of books, periodicals, and videos. The revamped **Casino** now features a dramatic black-and-silver color scheme, while next door a new nightclub, called **Luxe,** attracts attention with its polished aluminum Phillipe Stark bar stools and glass Bizzaza mosaics. The cozy little spot hosts karaoke a couple of times per cruise.

If learning is more your speed, there's a 25-seat classroom and an adjacent Internet center, both with brand-new Dell computers. The **Connoisseur's Club** cigar lounge (Monte Cristo, anyone?) is attractive with wood tones and dark leather furniture.

For young kids, *Symphony* has a cute playroom, Fantasia, with a tiered movie-viewing nook; for teens, there's a teen center/video arcade.

DINING OPTIONS Designed with curved walls and low, vaulted ceilings, the ship's main dining room is elegant and spacious, with dark wall paneling. Tables are not too close together, and there are well over 20 tables for two, mostly along the side or near the oceanview windows (try and sit along the outer portions, since the raised center section can get a bit noisy).

The ship's two themed, reservations-only alternative restaurants—the Italian **Prego** and Nobu's **Silk Road** and **The Sushi Bar**—are right up there with the best at sea. The **Vintage Room,** an intimate boardroom-style wine cellar, was added during the ship's 2004 refit to host special wine- and champagne-theme dinners and other events.

A casual indoor/outdoor buffet restaurant is open for breakfast and lunch, and the poolside **Trident Grill** serves ultracasual lunch as well as dinners several evenings per cruise. The newly redecorated **Bistro Café** is going for an earthy European ambience and it's open from 9:30am to 6pm for continental breakfast, snacks, specialty coffees, and more.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES *Symphony* provides a lot of outdoor activities and spacious areas in which to do them. There are two outdoor swimming pools separated by a bar, ice-cream counter, and sandwich grill, as well as two hot tubs. One of the pools is refreshingly oversize, stretching almost 40 feet across one of the sun decks; the other can be covered with a retractable glass roof. The gym and aerobics area are positioned for a view over the sea, with plenty of space for the line's complimentary yoga, Pilates, and aerobics classes (and personal training sessions too, for a fee). The Steiner-managed spa and salon has a quiet oceanview waiting room to create an atmosphere of peace and relaxation. On deck, there are a pair of golf driving nets, a putting green, a large paddle-tennis court, Ping-Pong tables, and a broad, uninterrupted teak Promenade Deck for walkers and joggers. Our favorite hideaway is a chaise longue along the lovely tiered aft decks facing the ship's wake.

2 Regent Seven Seas Cruises

1000 Corporate Dr., Ste. 500, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33334. ✆ **800/285-1835.** Fax 402/501-5599. www.rssc.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL Operating a fleet of stylish and extremely comfortable midsize vessels, Regent provides a casually elegant, luxurious cruise experience. Its service is as good as it gets, and its cuisine is near the top. **Sails to:** Caribbean, Alaska, Bermuda, Panama Canal (plus Europe, Asia, Australia/New Zealand, Africa/India, world cruises, Antarctica, South America).

THE EXPERIENCE If you insist on luxury but like to keep it quietly elegant, Regent might be your cruise line of choice. Its ships are spacious and understated, with a relaxed onboard vibe that tends to be less stuffy than Seabourn and Silversea. As aboard all the luxury ships (with the exception of Crystal's vessels), entertainment and activities are a relatively low priority, with guests left to enjoy their vacations at their own pace. Dress tends toward casual, though tuxedos and gowns aren't uncommon on formal evenings. Service is friendly and absolutely spot on, and cuisine is some of the best at sea, in both the formal dining rooms and the alternative restaurants. Even if what tickles your fancy isn't on the menu, the chef will prepare it for you. Passengers tend to be unpretentiously wealthy. When we've sailed, our social circle at dinner has included retired executives, an Atlantic City nightclub owner, a graphic artist, a nautical engineer, a theatrical casting director, and a woman who owned a string of Taco Bell franchises—all of them aboard to enjoy a quiet, relaxed vacation.

Pros

- **Great dining:** Cuisine is superb, and the main dining room and alternative restaurants operate on an open-seating basis, the latter by reservation.
- **Frequent sales:** Regent frequently offers free air and other deals, making its rates attractive to mainstream cruisers looking to move up to the luxe world.
- **Lots of private verandas:** *Seven Seas Navigator* has them in 90% of hers, and *Mariner* and *Voyager* have them on every single stateroom.
- **Amazing bathrooms on *Navigator* and *Voyager:*** Bigger and better than those on Seabourn and Crystal, these cabin bathrooms all have separate shower stalls and bathtubs long enough for normal-size humans.
- **You know where they're going to be:** Whereas many luxury ships hopscotch from cruise region to cruise region, never staying long in any one place, the three Regent ships sometimes spend full seasons in the Caribbean and Alaska, as well as the Mediterranean.

Cons

- **Not-quite-private balconies:** Walls separating the balconies aboard *Voyager* and *Navigator* don't extend to the edge of the ship's rail, making it possible to lean out and see what your neighbors are up to.

REGENT: LOW-KEY ELEGANCE

There's been a lot of change at this line over the past few years. First it went through a name change—from **Radisson Seven Seas Cruises** to Regent—to satisfy the desire of its owners to link the line's operations to those of its Regent Hotels group. Then, less than 2 years later, those same owners sold the line lock, stock, and barrel to the Apollo Management investment firm, which created and is now the majority shareholder in Prestige Cruise Holdings, operating Regent and Oceania Cruises and holding a 50% stake in NCL. As a result, there have been some changes at the line. Some improvements to amenities, decor, and technology were implemented in the wake of the Regent rebranding, and in 2007 the line poured another $20 million into further refurbishments, adding Wi-Fi computer access, onboard cellphone service, improved bed linens, new espresso bars in the Internet centers, and other upgrades. A further $40 million was committed for changes to *Seven Seas Voyager* in 2008, *Seven Seas Mariner* in 2009, and *Seven Seas Navigator* in the first half of 2010. For example, various public rooms have been or will soon be redesigned with new, highly upgraded furnishings and materials; *Voyager* and *Mariner* replaced their Indochine alternative restaurants with an upscale steakhouse; the Pool Grill was redone; and *Voyager* received an extended coffee and snack area similar to the very popular Coffee Connection on *Mariner.*

PASSENGER PROFILE

RSSC appeals primarily to well-traveled and well-heeled passengers in their 50s and 60s, but younger guests, honeymooners, and older cruisers pepper the mix as well. Many passengers are frequent cruisers who have also sailed on Silversea, Seabourn, and Crystal, or are taking a step up from Holland America, Celebrity, Princess, or one of the other mainstream lines. Though they have sophisticated tastes and can do without a lot of inane shipboard activities, they also appreciate the line's less formal ambience. On our recent cruises, casual nights in the main dining room saw some guests dressed in polo shirts and jackets and others in nice T-shirts with khakis and sneakers. You're also likely to find some women with full makeup, coifed hairdos, coordinated jewelry,

Compared with the other ultraluxury lines, here's how Regent rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor					✓
Dining				✓	
Activities			✓		
Children's Program		✓			
Entertainment			✓		
Service					✓
Worth the Money					✓

shoes, and handbags, and many men sporting businessman bling. A kids' program on summer sailings and some holiday sailings attracts some **families,** but the limited amount of third berths in suites tends to keep those numbers down.

DINING

Superb menus are designed for a sophisticated palate, and the overall cuisine is some of the best in the cruise industry. Each ship has an extensive wine list, with vintages from Germany, Italy, Australia, France, California, South Africa, and Chile.

TRADITIONAL In the main restaurants, elaborate and elegant meals are served in open seatings by a mostly European staff. Appetizers may include baked escargots in garlic-herb butter, beef carpaccio, and an eggplant-tomato-mozzarella roll; and main entrees include such enticing dishes as grilled venison medallions and mushroom fricassee, Chinese tangerine shrimp, and grilled grouper filet with pink grapefruit. Each dinner menu also offers a **vegetarian option** such as a forest mushroom quiche, and a **light and healthy choice** such as broiled whole Dover sole. When you've had enough of fancy, several standards called **simplicity dishes** are also available daily: pasta with tomato sauce, filet mignon, grilled chicken breast, or salmon filet. **Special diets** (kosher, halal, low-fat, low-salt, and so on) can be accommodated at all meals, but for very stringent regimes, such as glatt kosher, you must make arrangements before your cruise. Breakfasts include made-to-order omelets, as well as a typical selection of hot and cold breakfast foods. Lunch entrees include soups, salads, sandwiches, and entrees like Indian lamb patties with mint-coriander-lentil chutney, pan-seared chicken breast, and a fisherman's platter of fried jumbo prawns, scallops, and filets.

SPECIALTY *Mariner* and *Voyager* each have three alternate choices. The 110-seat **Signatures** restaurants are directed by chefs from Paris's famed **Le Cordon Bleu** cooking school, serving very elegant French cuisine. The new **Prime 7 steakhouse** offers prime aged steaks and chops along with fresh seafood and poultry entrees. Appetizers include avant-garde choices such as a trio of steak tartare and foie gras sliders with rhubarb chutney, as well as traditional items such as oysters Rockefeller and a jumbo lump crab cake. **La Veranda** serves Mediterranean and North African dishes in the evening, providing a casually elegant option.

Seven Seas Navigator has only one alternative choice: **Portofino,** an indoor/outdoor Italian restaurant serving dishes like Genoese minestrone soup, risotto primavera, spaghetti a la Bolognese, and sliced beef steak on wild rice with a balsamic-vinegar sauce.

Regent Seven Seas Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Navigator	**Caribbean:** 5-, 7-, 10- & 11-night eastern & western, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Feb–Apr). **Panama Canal:** 20-night, Fort Lauderdale to San Francisco (May). 18-night, San Francisco to Fort Lauderdale (Dec). **Alaska:** 14-night, San Francisco to Vancouver (May). 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Vancouver (Jun). 7-night Gulf of Alaska, north- & southbound between Vancouver & Seward/Anchorage (Jun–Sept).
Voyager	**Atlantic Coast:** 14-night, Fort Lauderdale to Reykjavik, Iceland (May). **Caribbean:** 7- & 10-night eastern & western (Nov–Dec). **Panama Canal:** 17-night, Fort Lauderdale to Los Angeles (Dec).

All alternative venues are intimate spaces with tables for two or four. Make reservations early in the cruise to guarantee yourself a table. Booked passengers can make specialty-dining reservations online before their cruise.

CASUAL All three vessels have casual buffet restaurants, plus a superb poolside sandwich grill staffed by waiters.

SNACKS & EXTRAS Hot hors d'oeuvres are served in the lounges before dinner, and if you take advantage of the 24-hour room service, a steward will come in and lay out a white tablecloth along with silverware and china, whether you've ordered a full-course dinner, a personal pizza, or just a plate of fruit. Specialty coffees, soft drinks, mineral water, and most alcoholic beverages are complimentary at all times, and **high tea** is served each afternoon.

ACTIVITIES

Days not spent exploring the ports are basically unstructured, with a variety of activities thrown in for those who aren't pursuing their own relaxation. During the day, there may be ballroom dance classes, wine tastings, art auctions, bingo, computer classes, bridge (with instructors sailing on all cruises), and **lectures** by visiting writers, anthropologists, naturalists, and retired diplomats, often speaking on a topic relevant to the region you're sailing—for example, colonial America on New England/Canada cruises, Incan culture on South America cruises, and so on.

Themed **Spotlight Cruises** may cover food and wine, photography, chocolate, music, the arts, and so on. On **Le Cordon Bleu cooking cruises,** for instance, chefs trained in the Le Cordon Bleu cooking method hold three onboard workshops, a special chef's dinner, and a market visit in port to see how the chef chooses the best local ingredients. Participation costs $499 per person. On **Art Experience** cruises, Regent teams with noted museums to offer art-related shore excursions and onboard lectures.

Active passengers can work out in the ships' gyms, run on the tracks, or whack some balls into a golf net, and then take a massage at the ships' spas, run by the French company **Carita of Paris.** Staffed by Carita-trained therapists and hairdressers, the spas offer company specialties such as their Rénovateur exfoliating process, as well as cruise spa standards such as hydrotherapy; reflexology; aromatherapy; body wraps; facials; manicure/pedicures; and anti-stress, therapeutic, and hot-rock massage.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

These ships are geared to mature adults, but summer sailings and select holiday cruises offer a **Club Mariner** kids program in which counselors supervise activities such as games, crafts projects, and movies for three age groups (ages 5–9, 10–13, and 14–17). For the younger kids, counselors are on hand for games, crafts projects, movies, and "food fun," while teens help the counselor select the activities they prefer. On non-summer/holiday cruises, an ad-hoc kids program is put together if enough kids are aboard to warrant it. Minimum age for children to sail aboard is 1 year, and the line reserves the right to limit the number of children under age 3 on any one sailing. In Alaska, children are treated to the **Ambassadors of the Environment** youth programs, operated under the auspices of Jean-Michel Cousteau's Ocean Futures Society. **Babysitting** may be available for $25 an hour if a female crewmember is willing to perform the service outside of her regular-duty hours.

ENTERTAINMENT

As on most luxe ships, entertainment is not the highest of priorities, and many guests are content to spend their evenings exploring the cocktail circuit, visiting the casino, singing along in the piano bar, or dancing to the ships' elegant musical groups. Still, all three ships have quality **musical revues** in their show lounges, with recent shows including *Thoroughly Modern Broadway,* a mix of musical theater numbers from the 1960s through 1980s; the Beatles tribute *Here, There and Everywhere;* the outstanding *Beyond Imagination,* which mixes opera and classical song with sea songs, folk tunes, and pseudo-classical modern hits; the wonderful *On a Classical Note,* with music by Mozart, Verdi, Rossini, Puccini, Gilbert and Sullivan, and Bizet; and *Oh What a Night,* with hits by the Four Seasons, Billy Joel, Simon and Garfunkel, Ray Charles, Neil Diamond, and others.

Occasional sailings provide **themed entertainment**—small-group and big-band jazz, for instance, or performances by a chamber group. Check with the line or your travel agent for a schedule of upcoming theme cruises.

SERVICE

Service by the mostly European and Filipino staff is a major plus. You rarely if ever hear the word *no,* and because the crew-to-passenger ratio is quite high, you rarely have to wait for someone else to get served first. Stewardesses care for your cabin ably and unobtrusively, **room service** is speedy and efficient, and restaurant waitstaff are supremely gracious and professional, with an intimate knowledge of the menu. Bar staff will often remember your drink order after the first day.

The ships all have complimentary **self-serve laundries** in addition to standard laundry and dry-cleaning services. **Cellphone service** is available (with passengers charged a roaming fee by their carrier), and **shipwide Wi-Fi** allows laptop users to connect to the Web from all public areas and most suites.

Gratuities are included in the cruise rates, but many guests still end up leaving more at the end of their trip.

Seven Seas Mariner • Seven Seas Voyager

The Verdict

The 700-passenger, all-suite *Mariner* and *Voyager* are Regent's largest ships, boasting balconies on every single stateroom, plus extra helpings of pampering.

Seven Seas Voyager *(photo: Regent)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)		Crew	447
Mariner	50,000	Passenger/Crew Ratio	1.6 to 1
Voyager	46,000	Year Launched	
Passengers (double occ.)	700	*Mariner*	2001
Passenger/Space Ratio		*Voyager*	2003
Mariner	71.4	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Voyager	65.7	*Mariner*	2009
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	350/350	*Voyager*	2008

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5) ★★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	5	Dining Options	4.5
Appearance & Upkeep	5	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	3.5
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	4.5	Enjoyment Factor	4.5

Introduced in 2001, the all-suite *Seven Seas Mariner* was designed to be exceedingly spacious, and was the first vessel built by any line to offer a private balcony on every single stateroom. Sister ship *Seven Seas Voyager,* which entered service 2 years later, continued this theme and offers improvements in some areas where we found *Mariner* lacking, particularly public-room warmth and bathroom layout. In addition, *Voyager* was designed with an efficient one-corridor approach, making for extremely smooth traffic flow in the public areas.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Suite	$450	252–1,204*	yes	yes	yes	yes

** These measurements for Seven Seas Mariner only. Suites on Voyager are slightly larger, at 306 to 1,216 square feet.*

CABINS Deluxe Suites represent the vast majority of the available accommodations aboard *Mariner* and *Voyager.* On *Mariner,* they measure 252 square feet, plus a 49-square-foot balcony; on *Voyager,* they've been enlarged to 306 square feet, with a 50-square-foot balcony. Even beyond size, *Voyager*'s standard accommodations are superior, with a warmer feel and more over-the-top marble bathrooms, each with separate shower/tub facilities. Conversely, *Mariner*'s top-end suites are somewhat larger than *Voyager*'s, from the forward-facing, 1,204-square-foot Master Suites (with

two balconies, including one enormous 721-sq.-ft. expanse) down to the 359-square-foot Horizon Suites, located in the stern and opening onto expansive views of the ship's wake from their oversized balconies. (*Voyager*'s Master Suites have only one balcony, measuring a comparatively tiny 183 sq. ft.)

All staterooms are designed with blond woods and rich fabrics and feature king-size beds convertible to twins, cotton bathrobes, hair dryer, flatscreen TV with DVD player (with movies available from the ships' DVD libraries), stocked refrigerator, safe, and large walk-in closet. Refurbishments in 2006, 2007, and 2008–09 upgraded cabin upholstery, mattresses, bed linens and duvets, towels, and bathroom amenities, and added slippers and bathrobes for guest use while aboard. Balconies overall are a little less than private—walls separating them do not extend to the edge of the ship's rail, making it possible to lean out and see what your neighbor is up to. Top-level accommodations, from Penthouses up to Master Suites, come with butler service and iPods with Bose speakers.

Six suites on *Mariner* and four on *Voyager* are wheelchair-friendly.

PUBLIC AREAS Both ships have beautifully laid-out two-deck theaters with terrific sightlines from virtually every seat, plus an Observation Lounge sitting high up on the top deck and featuring a semicircular bar, plush chairs and sofas, and a 180-degree view of the sea. It's a particularly attractive room at night. Lower down, each ship also boasts a well-stocked library, a cigar lounge, a card and conference room (popular with bridge players), and a computer center. A very nice feature here is that guests are charged only for transmission time, meaning you can compose a document in Word or another program free of charge, then open your e-mail and paste it in, and incur a cost only while you're in active e-mail mode. Wi-Fi access throughout the ships lets laptop users surf from all public areas and most suites, and cellphone access is also available via a satellite system. *Mariner* also has a dedicated disco, but who needs a disco on a luxe ship (except maybe the officers who hang out there)? On *Voyager,* the Voyager Lounge serves as the disco at night and (as aboard *Mariner*) as a piano lounge before dinner.

DINING OPTIONS *Mariner* and *Voyager* each have four restaurants, with the main dining room, the Compass Rose, serving all three meals in single open seatings. Casual breakfasts and lunches are available in the indoor/outdoor La Veranda Restaurant, up near the top of the ship on Deck 11.

Two reservations-only (but no-charge) restaurants are open for dinner only. Signatures features world-ranging and primarily French upscale cuisine prepared in classic French style by chefs trained at Paris's famous Le Cordon Bleu School. The new Prime 7 steakhouses offer prime aged steaks and chops along with fresh seafood and poultry entrees. Appetizers include avant-garde choices such as a trio of steak tartare and foie gras sliders with rhubarb chutney as well as traditional items such as oysters Rockefeller and a jumbo lump crab cake. Additionally, in the evening, half of La Veranda is turned into an excellent candlelit, white-tablecloth Mediterranean Bistro with a combination of waiter and self-service dining. Grilled food is available poolside, and might just be the best pool food at sea. Room service runs 24 hours, and guests can even have the Compass Rose dinner menu served course by course in their suites during dinner hours.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES Each ship's one pool and three hot tubs are located on Deck 11. Deck chairs are set up around the roomy pool area, as well as on the forward half of the deck above, where you'll also find a paddle-tennis

court, golf driving nets, shuffleboard courts, and an uninterrupted jogging track. Sunbathing doesn't seem to be the biggest priority for Regent guests, so deck chairs are usually readily available, even on sea days in warm cruising areas.

Each ship's somewhat spartanly decorated Carita spa is located in an attractive but rather small space. A similarly smallish oceanview gym and separate aerobics area are located in the same area, as well as a salon.

Seven Seas Navigator

The Verdict

Warm and appealing, the 490-passenger *Navigator* is an ideal size for an ultraluxe cruise: small enough to be intimate and large enough to offer plenty of elbowroom, more than a few entertainment outlets, and some of the best cabin bathrooms at sea.

Seven Seas Navigator *(photo: Regent)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	33,000	Crew	324
Passengers (double occ.)	490	Passenger/Crew Ratio	1.5 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio	67.3	Year Launched	1999
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	245/215	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	2007

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	5	Dining Options	4
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4
Public Comfort/Space	4	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	4.5

Navigator has well-laid-out cabins and public rooms, and if you've been on the Silversea ships, you'll notice a similar layout (especially in the Star Lounge and Galileo Lounge), as the interiors were all designed by the same architects and built at the same yard, Italy's Mariotti. While *Navigator*'s interior is very attractive, outside she looks a little bit top-heavy, a consequence of her odd provenance: Her hull was originally built to be a Russian spy ship. When Regent purchased the uncompleted vessel, they redesigned her superstructure with additional decks.

Navigator is scheduled for an extensive refurbishment in the first half of 2010.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Suite	$428	301–1,067	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS *Navigator* is an all-suite, all-outside-cabin ship, so there's not a bad room in the house. Each elegant suite is done up in shades of deep gold, beige, and burnt orange, with caramel-toned wood furniture and a swath of butterscotch suede just

above the beds. Nearly 90% of them have private balconies, with only suites on the two lowest passenger decks having bay windows instead. Of these, the only ones with obstructed views are those on the port side of Deck 6 looking out onto the promenade. The standard suites are a roomy 301 square feet; the 18 top suites range from 448 to 1,067 square feet, plus 47- to 200-square-foot balconies. Every suite has a sitting area with couch, terry robes, pair of chairs, desk, vanity table and stool (with an outlet above for a hair dryer or curling iron), flatscreen TV with DVD player (and movies available from an onboard library), minibar stocked with two complimentary bottles of wine or spirits, private safe, and wide walk-in closet with a tall built-in dresser. The marble bathrooms that come standard in all suites are absolutely huge, with a separate shower stall, a long tub, and lots of counter space. Along with those on *Seven Seas Voyager* and Silversea's *Silver Whisper,* they're the best bathrooms at sea today. In 2006 and 2007, all suites received new upholstery, mattresses, bed linens and duvets, towels, and bathroom amenities, plus slippers and bathrobes for guest use while aboard. Top-level accommodations, from Penthouses up to Master Suites, come with butler service and iPods with Bose speakers.

Four suites are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS Full of autumn hues and deep blues, *Navigator*'s attractive decor is a marriage of classic and modern design, with contemporary wooden furniture, chairs upholstered in buttery leather, walls covered in suede, and touches of stainless steel, along with silk brocade draperies, dark-wood paneling, burled veneer, and marble. The ship has lots of intimate spaces, so you'll never feel overwhelmed the way you sometimes do on larger ships.

Most of the public rooms are on Decks 6 and 7, just aft of the three-story atrium and main elevator bank (whose exposed wiring and mechanics could have been better disguised). The well-stocked library has 10 computers with e-mail and Internet access, while Wi-Fi hot spots let laptop users surf from several public areas. The cozy Navigator Lounge, paneled in mahogany and cherrywood, is a popular place for pre-dinner cocktails, which means it can get tight in there during rush hour. Next door is the Connoisseur Club cigar lounge, a somewhat cold and often underutilized wood-paneled room with umber leather chairs. Down the hall is the roomier Stars Lounge, with a long, curved, black-granite bar and clusters of oversize ocean-blue armchairs around a small dance floor. A live music duo croons pop numbers here nightly. The attractive dark-paneled casino with its striking mural is bound to attract your eye, even if you don't gamble.

Galileo's Lounge, surrounded by windows on three sides, is our favorite spot in the evening, when a pianist is on hand and the golden room glows magically under soft light. On warm nights the doors to the outside deck are thrown open and dancers spill out from the small dance floor, creating a truly romantic, dreamy scene. By day, Galileo's is a quiet venue for continental breakfast, high tea, seminars, and meetings, and is also a perfect perch from which to view the seascape.

The stage of the twinkling two-story Seven Seas Lounge is large enough for the kind of sizable, Vegas-style song-and-dance revues typical of much larger ships—a rarity in the luxe market. While sightlines are good from the tiered rows of banquettes on the first level, views from the sides of the balcony are severely obstructed.

The cheerful windowed Vista observation lounge is used for meetings and is another great scenery-viewing spot. It opens directly out to a huge patch of forward deck space just over the bridge.

DINING OPTIONS There are two restaurants, the formal **Compass Rose** dining room and the more casual **Portofino Grill,** which serves buffet-style breakfast and lunch and is transformed every evening into a very cozy, dimly lit, reservations-only restaurant specializing in Tuscan cuisine with southern Italian accents. Many tables for two are available, and wine tastings are done just before dinner. Its menus are inspired by Chef Angelo Elia of Fort Lauderdale's Casa D'Angelo Ristorante, though its overall dinner experience was inherited from the popular Don Vito's restaurant on the line's dear, departed *Radisson Diamond,* with its singing Italian waiters and fun, participatory vibe. The Compass Rose, a pleasant, wide-open room done in warm caramel-colored woods, offers a single open seating at all meals. There's also a casual grill on the pool deck for burgers, grilled-chicken sandwiches, fries, and salads at lunchtime, as well as a Coffee Corner on Deck 6, with complimentary deluxe coffees available (from a machine) 24 hours a day.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The oceanview gym is bright and roomy for a ship of this size, and a separate aerobics room offers impressively grueling classes, such as circuit training and step. A pair of golf nets and two Ping-Pong tables are available for guest use, but they're situated high on Deck 12 in an ash-plagued nook just behind the smokestacks, and are accessible only by a hard-to-find set of interior crew stairs. The whole area looks like an afterthought. At the pool area, a wide set of stairs joins a balcony of deck chairs to a large pool and pair of hot tubs on the deck below. Adjacent to the gym is *Navigator*'s six-room Carita spa.

3 Seabourn Cruise Line

6100 Blue Lagoon Dr., Ste. 400, Miami, FL 33126. ✆ **800/929-9391** or 305/463-3070. www.seabourn.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL Genteel and refined, these small megayachts are intimate, quiet, and very comfortable, lavishing guests with plenty of personal attention and very fine cuisine.

THE EXPERIENCE Strictly upper-crust Seabourn caters to guests who are well mannered and prefer their fellow vacationers to be the same. Generally, they aren't into pool games and deck parties, preferring a good book and cocktail chatter, or a taste of the line's special complimentary goodies, such as free minimassages on deck and soothing eucalyptus-oil baths drawn in suites upon request.

Due to the ships' small sizes, guests mingle easily and enjoy mellow pursuits such as trivia games and presentations by guest lecturers. An extremely high passenger/crew ratio and a high standard of training ensure that service is both personal and top notch. Staff members greet you by name from the moment you check in, and your wish is their command.

Pros

- **Top-shelf service:** Staff seems to know what you need before you ask.
- **Totally all-inclusive:** Unlimited wines and spirits are included, as are gratuities.
- **Nontouristy ports of call:** These small ships are able to visit smaller, less touristed ports that bigger ships can't access.
- **Excellent dining:** Even the breakfast buffets are exceptional, and having dinner on the outside deck of the Veranda Café is divine, with the ship's wake churning just below you.

Cons

- **Limited activities and nightlife:** There's not a whole lot going on on board, but most guests like it that way.
- **Older vessels getting older:** When compared to the newer ships of its competitors, Seabourn's *Spirit* and *Legend* lack luster, though recent renovations have spiffed up cabins and many public areas. This criticism obviously doesn't apply to the brand-new *Odyssey.*

SEABOURN: THE CAVIAR OF CRUISE SHIPS

Seabourn was established in 1987 when luxury-cruise patriarch Warren Titus and Norwegian shipping mogul Atle Brynestad commissioned a trio of ultraupscale 10,000-ton vessels from a north German shipyard. They sold the line to industry giant Carnival Corporation in 1991 and eventually transferred the ships' registries from Oslo to The Bahamas, but the ships' captains are still Norwegian; their decor is very Scandinavian; and you may still find your suite minibar stocked with bottles of Norwegian Ringnes Pilsener.

Today, "The Yachts of Seabourn" (as the line officially calls itself) operates some of the smallest vessels in the luxury market and focuses on the strengths that go along with that: doting, personalized service; fine food and wine; and the ability to venture into exotic harbors where megaships can't go. Though the line's new, 450-passenger ***Seabourn Odyssey*** is significantly bigger than its older vessels, it's still a boutique-size ship. Sister ships to *Odyssey* are *Seabourn Sojourn,* due to enter service in summer 2010, and an as-yet-unnamed ship scheduled for summer 2011.

As *Seabourn Odyssey* debuted just days before press time, all matters dealing with that ship are covered in the ship review beginning on p. 292.

PASSENGER PROFILE

Seabourn's guests are well-traveled adults from their 40s to 70s who are used to the five-star treatment. Many are current or former executives, lawyers, investment bankers, real-estate tycoons, and entrepreneurs and have net worths in the millions. The majority of passengers are couples, and there's always a handful of singles as well. Though most passengers are American and British, guests from Germany, Switzerland, Australia, and elsewhere sometimes spice up the mix. As for families with children, they're the exception rather than the rule, and only occasionally appear during the holidays and summers. These ships do not cater to kids at all, and Seabourn passengers prefer it that way.

Compared with the other ultraluxury lines, here's how Seabourn rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor					✓
Dining					✓
Activities		✓			
Children's Program	N/A*				
Entertainment		✓			
Service				✓	
Worth the Money				✓	

** Seabourn has no regular children's program; even at holidays, it's skimpy.*

DINING

Seabourn's cuisine is very, very good and remains one of the line's strong points.

TRADITIONAL Aboard *Spirit* and *Legend,* meals are provided in a single open seating in the main dining rooms, allowing guests to dine whenever they choose and with whomever they want, between about 7 and 10pm. Dinner service is high style, with waiters dramatically lifting silver lids off dishes in unison and almost running at a trot through the elaborate, six-course meals. Service is attentive and unobtrusive, and the waitstaff is programmed to please. Celebrity restaurateur **Charlie Palmer,** of New York's Aureole and Astra fame, is behind the ships' menus, and the ships' chefs are trained by Palmer's shore-side restaurants.

Appetizers may include such dishes as citrus-marinated fluke, iced Russian Malossol caviar, sautéed escallope of foie gras, and eggplant relish and hummus. Five entrees change nightly and may include such dishes as pink-roasted rack of veal, rosemary-grilled double-cut lamb chops, roast prime rib, pan-fried sea bass, whole pan-fried Dover sole, scallops wrapped in smoked bacon, and, of course, lobster. **Vegetarian entrees** might include toasted angel-hair pasta with black trumpet mushrooms and a stew of braised artichokes, with white beans, thyme roasted tomatoes, and diced saffron potatoes. A number of **classics** are always on the menu (think baked filet of salmon, grilled New York sirloin, filet mignon, and Caesar salad), as are a number of **lighter-choice** options. If nothing on the menu appeals to you, just ask for something you'd prefer and the galley will do its best to whip it up. Decadent **desserts** include the likes of three-chocolate crème brûlée and hot Grand Marnier soufflé, plus ice creams, sorbets, frozen yogurt, and a selection of international cheeses.

Formal nights (one per weeklong cruise) are very formal, with many gentleman aboard wearing a tuxedo and ladies dressed in sequins and gowns. On other nights, things have relaxed somewhat as Seabourn focuses on attracting a younger crowd (younger as in 40- and 50-somethings), so ties are not required. Regardless, passengers always look very pulled together.

Complimentary wines (about 18 on any given cruise, including champagne) are served not only at lunch and dinner, but basically any time and place you want them. Ditto for spirits and soft drinks. An extensive list of extra-cost vintages is also available.

SPECIALTY Every evening per cruise, including formal nights, *Legend*'s and *Spirit*'s Veranda Café (see "Casual" below) is transformed into a new indoor/outdoor venue called **Restaurant 2,** featuring multicourse tasting menus for up to 72 guests per night (reservations are suggested). A pair of chefs prepares an array of small plates typically served two to a course during the five- to six-course meals. Expect such dishes as artichoke salad, cured and roasted duck breast, lemon grass seafood presse, crispy sea bass, and barbecue-glazed short ribs. Your meal might end with something like a "sweet coffee sandwich" with sea-salt caramel ice cream and hazelnut foam. The ambience is more casual here than at The Restaurant, with a "jackets but no ties" rule for men on formal nights.

On *Legend* and *Spirit,* the outdoor Sky Bar on Deck 8 is transformed into the **Sky Grill** dining alternative a couple of nights per cruise, weather permitting. It offers freshly grilled seafood and sizzling steak dinners for about 40 guests, by reservation only.

Neither of these alternative dining options entails an extra charge.

Seabourn Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Legend	**Central America:** 14-night, Fort Lauderdale to Caldera, Costa Rica (Jan–Feb). **Caribbean:** 7-night, Fort Lauderdale to St. Thomas, r/t St. Thomas, & St. Thomas to Fort Lauderdale (Mar).
Odyssey	**Panama Canal:** 16-night, Fort Lauderdale to Los Angeles (Jan). **Caribbean:** 16-night, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Dec).
Sojourn	**Caribbean:** 10-, 11-, 12- & 16-night, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Nov–Dec).

CASUAL On *Legend* and *Spirit,* the indoor/outdoor **Veranda Café** offers a combination buffet and table-service menu at breakfast and lunch. At breakfast, omelets are made to your specifications, and there's also an impressive fresh-fruit selection along with the usual breakfast spread. At lunch, you'll find salads, sandwich makings, fresh pasta, and maybe jumbo shrimp, smoked salmon, and smoked oysters, plus hot sliced roast beef, duck, and ham on the carving board.

One night on each warm-weather itinerary includes a **festive buffet dinner** served by the pool.

SNACKS & EXTRAS Daily afternoon **tea service** includes a slew of exotic teas, freshly loose brewed to order. **Room service** is available 24 hours a day on all ships. During normal lunch or dinner hours, your private multicourse meal can mirror the dining room service, right down to the silver, crystal, and porcelain. Don't expect the same level of service you get in the restaurants, but do expect a very cushy, lazy way of "ordering in" one night, with meals served course by course. Outside of mealtimes, the room-service menu is more limited, though you can order treats such as gourmet pizza (topped with garlic rock shrimp, cherry tomatoes, and a basil-and-goat-cheese crumble) and crudités served with tzatziki dip, along with the more humdrum burgers, salads, sandwiches, pastas, and so on. In-cabin breakfasts are popular, and you can have your eggs prepared any way you like them.

ACTIVITIES

The Seabourn ships are sociable because of their small sizes, but organized activities are typically limited to such things as trivia contests, galley tours, computer classes, **wine tastings,** bridge tournaments, exercise classes, and makeover demonstrations. The lack of in-your-face, "rah-rah" activities is one of the things passengers like most about Seabourn. Public announcements are few, and, for the most part, passengers are left alone to enjoy conversation and pursue their personal peace. As well, most itineraries tend to be port-intensive, with limited days at sea.

All Seabourn ships have retractable **watersports marinas** that unfold from their stern, allowing passengers direct access to the sea for water-skiing, windsurfing, sailing, snorkeling, banana-boat riding, kayaking, and swimming. These are used, weather and sea conditions permitting, on special "marina days" when at anchor, and during beach parties ashore on select cruises. Many cruises feature a **guest lecturer** or two discussing upcoming ports, as well as other random topics. Noted chefs, scientists, historians, authors, or statesmen may be aboard, or maybe a wine connoisseur,

composer, anthropologist, TV director, or professor, presenting lectures and mingling with guests.

Recent-release movies are available for viewing in cabins, and movies are sometimes shown out on deck as well, with popcorn. All suites have flatscreen TVs, DVD players, and Bose Wave CD players, and each ship has a library of music and audio books.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

These ships are not geared to children, but during summer and winter holidays, there may be a small number of kids on board. The line has no special programs, menus, or playrooms, but if several children are aboard, the staff may arrange "mocktail" parties or video viewings during days at sea. In a pinch, you may be able to arrange for an available crewmember to provide babysitting service. Minimum age for sailing is 1 year.

ENTERTAINMENT

Due to the ships' small size, there are no elaborate, splashy production shows such as you sometimes find on the larger luxe ships of Regent and Crystal. Instead, a variety of smaller entertainment is offered each night, with dancing and cabaret in the main lounge (the former accompanied by a six-piece band, the latter often featuring comedians, puppeteers, and so on), dancing to a duo before and after dinner in **The Club,** and a late-night DJ for dancing. There's quiet guitar or piano music in the observation lounge, while jazz or blues is sometimes performed under the stars at the **Sky Bar.**

Adjacent to The Club, *Legend* and *Spirit* offer a small, rather drab casino with a handful of card tables and slots.

SERVICE

Seabourn's staff is one of its most valuable assets, offering service that's friendly, courteous, discreet, and highly competent. Most of the staff is European, and most have gained experience at fine European hotels. The cabin staff is all female. All **gratuities** are included in the rates.

If you don't want to deal with lugging your luggage to the airport (or to your car, even), Seabourn offers a service that will **ship your bags** directly to your vessel and back.

Each ship has a small business center with computers for e-mail and Internet access. **Wi-Fi** connections are also available everywhere aboard for people who bring their own laptops.

Laundry and **dry cleaning** are available, and there are also complimentary self-service laundry rooms.

Seabourn Odyssey • Seabourn Sojourn (preview)

The Verdict

Seabourn's first newbuild in two decades is simply stunning. Much bigger than the line's earlier ships, it uses its extra space to great advantage, most notably with wonderful public spaces (especially the dining spots), a very high space ratio, and the addition of balconies on virtually every suite.

Seabourn Odyssey *(photo: Seabourn Cruise Line)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	32,000	Crew	330
Passengers (double occ.)	450	Passenger/Crew Ratio	1.4
Passenger/Space Ratio	71	Year Launched	2009
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	225/199	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	N/A

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	5	Dining Options	5
Appearance & Upkeep	5	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4.5
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	5	Enjoyment Factor	5

Seabourn hasn't had a new ship since 1992 (when *Seabourn Legend* debuted), and no one thought it ever would have one again. All that changed in late 2006, when the line announced plans to build three new 32,000-ton, 450-passenger vessels. *Seabourn Odyssey* is the first of the trio to hit the seas, debuting in summer 2009. (*Seabourn Sojourn* is scheduled for delivery in summer 2010, and the third as-yet-unnamed ship is scheduled for summer 2011.)

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diem From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Suite	$357	295–914	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS The ship's 225 suites are all outside, and 199 of them have private balconies. Decor offers a softly muted color palette and fashionable furniture that doesn't distract (or clutter up the room) by being over-the-top plush. About 85% of all rooms fit into the Verandah Suite and Seabourn Suite categories, all measuring about 295 to 300 square feet, plus a 65-square-foot private balcony with each Verandah Suite. All of these staterooms have separate bedroom and living room areas, queen-size or twin beds, walk-in closets, flat-screen TVs with music and movie channels, fully stocked (and complimentary) bar and refrigerator, writing desk (with personalized stationery being a nice if sort of frilly touch), separate tub and shower in the bathroom, robes, slippers, hair dryers, and more. Both the walk-in closets and the drawers are plenty spacious and the push-to-open and -close mechanism for the drawers is excellent.

At the higher end, accommodations run from the Penthouse Suites (which measure from 436 sq. ft., plus 98-sq.-ft. balconies) all the way up to the Wintergarden Suites (which measure 914 sq. ft., plus two balconies totaling 183 sq. ft.) and the forward-placed Signature Suites (at 907 sq. ft. inside and a massive 353-sq.-ft. balcony outside). For those who need even more space, the suites next door to either the Wintergarden or Signature Suites can be added on. All of these suites come with added amenities when compared to the so-called smaller suites, including (based on category) separate dining areas, an extra TV, butler pantry, whirlpool tubs, guest bath, an extra closet, an extra bedroom, glass-enclosed solarium with tub and day bed, and

even an extra bar. The Wintergarden Suites, placed as they are midships, have a curved balcony that allows 180-degree viewing forward and aft.

Seven suites are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS *Seabourn Odyssey* is much more than a proportionately larger vessel compared to Seabourn's earlier ships. The company has done a sensational job of using the extra tonnage while also increasing the passenger-space ratio, and they've done this while remaining faithful to many of the design and decor features that made the three smaller ships so popular and so highly rated. The Club is one popular room that has gotten bigger. There's still the back bar area, sort of set apart from the rest of the room and the stage by glass barriers, while the rest of the room has the stage, the dance floor, and lots of seating. The aft area outside The Club has a pool, whirlpool, and a smattering of seating. It's one of the ship's many great daytime escapes. Seabourn Square is a new addition, and sure to be a big hit on every voyage. Essentially serving the purpose of a concierge area (such as you'd see at a small luxury hotel), it has four central desks grouped behind mid-height dividers that take care of all administration needs, including those traditionally covered by the purser's desk (of which there's none on board). Grouped around are a variety of sitting areas for the library, the Internet area (with its eight computers), and a neat little European-style cafe serving snacks and beverages.

The main entertainment lounge is the place for the small production shows staged by four talented performers. This is probably the only room on board that's not quite up to snuff, or at least the fine snuff that's otherwise the standard here. Pillars hinder sightlines, and the assortment of seating types is less than really comfy. Another evening (and day) option is the Observation Bar way up on Deck 10. With its piano for live pre-and post-dinner music and a 270-degree beyond the bow, it's a wonderful quiet room during the day and a fun conversation/dancing/meeting place in the evening. Other public rooms such as the casino, card room, and shops are no larger than they need to be. On the utilitarian side, there are two free guest laundry rooms as well.

DINING OPTIONS The stunningly attractive The Restaurant is done primarily in white with silver highlights. It seats 450, meaning there are enough seats here for every guest on board to dine at the same time. The central two-story section is our preferred dining spot as it offers a greater feeling of space and is a bit quieter, but the tables for two and four along the windows are also very appealing, especially depending on what time of the year one cruises. The billowing white curtain dividers add intimacy to the overall space.

Restaurant 2, open in the evening for specially combined pairing menus, is done in black and red with really comfy chairs. The casual restaurant, The Colonnade, is one of the most beautiful rooms we've seen for this purpose. There are 138 seats inside and 124 seats outside, making it big enough so that guests can really linger, enjoying breakfasts and lunches that combine great buffets with custom-made items. The Chef's Table setup also makes a limited number of items as guests look on. (Our

favorite meal on board was when the chef put two beautiful crab cakes on a delightfully decorated plate and we then combined them with great grilled shrimps and salad items from the buffet.) At night this room has a variety of themed dinners. Those who want to dine outside during the day will also enjoy the patio with grilled items (burgers, franks, chicken and so on), plus pizza (from noon–3pm), panini, and more. All specialty dining is complimentary, but reservations are recommended for dinner in either Restaurant 2 or The Colonnade.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES This is an area where Seabourn has really put *Odyssey's* extra space to great use. The pool area on Deck 8 is, especially compared to the line's smaller ships, very spacious and a wonderful location for relaxing and enjoying the outside world. The nicely sized pool is surrounded by two large whirlpools. Above the pool area, on Deck 9, is an additional area full of deck chairs. One surprising note: While the chairs were comfortable, there were no cushions. Way up at the top of the ship and forwardly placed is the Sun Terrace, probably the quietest place to relax and enjoy the view and the sun. Perhaps the most overlooked pool area is the aft section of the ship behind The Club, which offers a small pool plus two whirlpools, as well as lounge chairs and tables. It's quiet, and views over the ship's wake are mesmerizing.

Seabourn is justifiably proud of its two-deck spa and gym area, called simply The Spa at Seabourn. Run by Steiner Leisure (as are most other ship spas), it's a series of rooms ranging from gym to spa, salon to private villas, spa pool to "kinesis wall" (a kind of modular strength-training system that requires some explanation from one of the gym's trainers). Overall, it's 11,400 square feet and designed with an indoor/outdoor look and feel. The gym is much larger than aboard the line's smaller ships, with 19 pieces of training equipment as well as 8 high-tech treadmills. Those who want a retreat within a retreat can rent out either of two spa villas for specialized treatments of up to four hours (or longer based on special arrangements). Each villa can accommodate up to four guests for private massages including stone therapy, facials, bathing rituals, and more. The regular spa and salon are no slouches either when it comes to offering exotic treatments, including the Seabourn 24 Karat Gold Facial, the Elemis Tri-Enzyme Resurfacing Facial, SkinCeuticals Gel Peel Treatment, Bamboo Massage, That Herbal Poultice Massage, Fire and Ice Manicures and Pedicures, and many, many more, all of them in the not-so-cheap category.

Seabourn Spirit • Seabourn Legend

The Verdict

Though a bit dated, these smallish megayachts are almost a throwback to a more intimate and refined, less frenetic, and definitely less glitzy style of cruising.

Seabourn Legend *(photo: Seabourn Cruise Line)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	10,000	Passenger/Crew Ratio	1.5 to 1
Passengers (double occ.)	208	Year Launched	
Passenger/Space Ratio	48.1	*Spirit*	1989
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	100/6	*Legend*	1992
Crew	157	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	2008

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	3.5
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	3
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	3	Enjoyment Factor	4

Want posh and private? Then grab your Louis Vuitton valise and come aboard these sleek little ships for a cruise to some of the smaller Caribbean ports. The vessels hold just 208 passengers each, so you'll never feel lost in the crowd. In fact, you'll practically feel like you own the place. Choose to be as social or as private as you wish, with no rowdiness or loud music and no one exhorting you to get involved. While you're aboard, the ship is your floating boutique hotel or your private yacht. You make the call.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diem From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Suite	$336	277–575	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS Just about everything in Seabourn's standard 277-square-foot suites has the feel of an upscale Scandinavian hotel, including ocean views, ice-blue or champagne color schemes, lots of bleached oak or birch-wood trim, and mirrors and spot lighting to keep things bright. Only the Owner's Suites have proper balconies, though 36 regular suites on Decks 5 and 6 have French balconies with sliding doors and a few inches of decking—not nearly enough to fit a chair, but they do allow sunlight to pour into the cabin and afford a great view up and down the length of the ship. You can sit on the sofa or in a chair and read while sunning yourself out of the wind and out of view. You can also sleep with the doors wide open and the sounds and smells of the ocean pouring in—unless, of course, the officers on the bridge decide to lock up: If seas get even a little choppy or the wind picks up, a flick of a switch locks your door automatically and there's not a thing you can do about it. (Remember, these ships are small, so you're not that far above the waterline. The cruise line likes to avoid waves and sea spray messing up its lovely decor.)

The best features of the suites are their bathrooms and spacious walk-in closets (which contrast with a fairly minimal amount of drawer space). White marble bathrooms usually include both a tub and a shower (though 10–14 suites on each ship have showers only), and lots of shelf, counter, and cabinet space. Molton Brown bath products plus designer soaps by Chanel, Bijan, Hermès, and Bronnley are provided for guests along with a world atlas, terry bathrobes, slippers, and umbrellas to use on board.

The coffee table in the sitting area can be pulled up to become a dining table, and the minibar is stocked on embarkation day with a chilled bottle of champagne and two bottles of complimentary liquor or wine of your choice (a request form comes with your cruise documents). Unlimited bottled water, beer, and soft drinks are restocked throughout the cruise. Ice is replenished twice daily (more often on request), and bar setups are in each room. Each cabin has a desk, hair dryer, safe, radio/CD player (music CDs and audio books are available for borrowing), and flatscreen TVs and DVD players. Fresh fruit and a flower complete the suite scene.

The two Classic Suites measure 400 square feet, and a pair of Owner's Suites on each ship measure 530 and 575 square feet, and have verandas, dining areas, and guest powder rooms. Their dark-wood furnishings make the overall feeling more like a hotel room than a ship's suite, but, as is true of any cabins positioned near the bow of relatively small ships, they can be somewhat uncomfortable during rough seas. Owner's Suites 05 and 06 have obstructed views.

Connecting suites are available. Some are marketed as 554-square-foot Double Suites, and that's exactly what they are: two 277-square-foot suites, with one converted to a lounge.

There are four wheelchair-accessible suites on each ship.

PUBLIC AREAS Step onto most ships today, and you'll oooh and ahhh at the decor. Not so here, where a minimalist Scandinavian design aesthetic is in play. For the most part, public rooms are spare and almost ordinary looking. Art and ornamentation are conspicuous by their absence, with the exception of the small lobby area in front of the purser's desk on Deck 5, where attractive murals of ship scenes liven up the curved walls.

The forward-facing observation lounge on Sky Deck is the most attractive public room, a quiet venue for reading or cards, the spot for afternoon tea (during which a pianist provides background music), and a good place for a drink before meals. A chart and compass on the wall outside will help you pinpoint the ship's current position, and a computerized wall map lets you track future cruises.

The Club piano bar in the stern has great views during daylight hours, is packed before dinner, and sometimes has after-dinner entertainment such as a Name That Tune game or a cabaret show. Hors d'oeuvres are served here before and after dinner. A tiny, cramped casino is adjacent, with a couple of blackjack tables, a roulette wheel, and about 10 slots. The downstairs show lounge is a dark, tiered, all-purpose space for lectures, the captain's cocktail party, and featured entertainers such as singers, comedians, and pianists.

One of the best places for a romantic, moonlit moment is the isolated patch of deck far forward in the bow on Deck 5, where a lone hot tub also resides.

DINING OPTIONS The formal Restaurant, located on the lowest deck, is a large, low-ceilinged room with elegant candlelit tables. It's open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner; officers, cruise staff, and sometimes guest lecturers host tables at dinnertime. If you're not in the mood for the formal dining room, the Veranda Café serves a combination buffet and full-service breakfast and lunch. Come evening, the cafe becomes the casual specialty Restaurant 2, serving multicourse tasting menus by reservation only.

Along with burgers, chicken, hot dogs, and grilled items, a special of the day—maybe pizza with pineapple topping, or fresh ingredients for tacos—is also available at the pleasant Sky Bar, overlooking the Lido Deck, for those who don't want to change out of their swimsuits. On sunny days, themed lunches are often served here, and in the evening it offers a steak-and-seafood menu by reservation. Occasionally, the tables and chairs may be pushed back later at night so the area can host entertainment and dancing.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES The outdoor pool, which gets little use, is awkwardly situated in a shadowy location aft of the open Deck 7, between the twin engine uptakes and flanked by lifeboats hanging from both sides. A pair of whirlpools is better situated just forward of the pool. A third hot tub is perched far forward on Deck 5. It's wonderfully isolated and a perfect spot (as is the whole patch of deck here) from which to watch a port come into sight or fade away.

A retractable, wood-planked watersports marina opens out from the stern of each ship so that passengers can hop into sea kayaks or go windsurfing, water-skiing, or snorkeling right from the vessel. An attached steel mesh net creates a protected salt-water pool when the marina is in use.

Located forward of the Lido Deck, the gym and Steiner-managed spa are surprisingly roomy for ships this small, and renovations have incorporated modern gym equipment. There are also find two saunas, massage rooms, and a beauty salon. Yoga, Pilates, and aerobics classes are held in a lounge or on deck.

4 SeaDream Yacht Club

2601 S. Bayshore Dr., Penthouse 1B, Coconut Grove, FL 33133. ✆ **800/707-4911** or 305/631-6100. Fax 305/631-6110. www.seadreamyachtclub.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL Among our favorite ship experiences, this pair of intimate cruise-ships-turned-yachting-vessels delivers an upscale yet casual Caribbean experience without the regimentation of traditional cruise itineraries and activities. **Also sails to:** Europe, South America.

THE EXPERIENCE SeaDream was created for independent-minded travelers craving high-end service and food sans formality and rigid schedules. Step aboard one of these 100-passenger yachts and you're boarding a floating club of mostly like-minded travelers who cringe at the thought of sailing en masse to the St. Thomases of the world. It's an intimate group that wants to feel like it inhabits an exclusive and remote seaside hamlet on some hard-to-reach, difficult-to-spell island, where the food is good, the masseuses are on hand, and the drinks are flowing. On a SeaDream cruise, everything is included in the cruise fare and you'll never be pestered to pay for drinks or tip the crew. There also aren't art auctions, roving photographers, or "special" restaurants vying for your money, but instead cool adult toys such as WaveRunners, appealing Caribbean ports off the megaship drag, and pampering service that includes complimentary orders of jumbo shrimp served to you in the hot tub (or wherever) whenever the desire strikes. The line's flexible itineraries and fluid daily schedules should appeal to landlubbers used to exclusive resort vacations.

Pros

- **Truly all-inclusive:** Unlimited wines and spirits as well as tips are included in the rates.
- **Cool tech stuff:** These ships were built in the mid-1980s, but they've been outfitted for the 21st century. Every cabin is equipped with a flatscreen TV, Internet access, and CD and DVD players; jet skis, MP3 players, and Segway Human Transporters are available for passenger use.
- **Late-night departures from key ports:** Instead of leaving port around cocktail hour—just when things begin to get interesting—the ships will stay late or even overnight in places such as St. Barts to allow passengers a night of carousing on terra firma.
- **Flexible itineraries:** Captains have the authority to duck inclement weather by visiting a different port or to extend a stay off an island because of perfect snorkeling conditions.

Cons

- **Rough seas:** While the intimacy of these ships can be a selling point, their size can be a detriment: They bob like buoys in even mildly rough waters, and the diesel engines sometimes produce a shimmying sensation.
- **Limited entertainment:** A piano player and a sidekick are the sum total of the ship's entertainment. Mostly it's socializing with other passengers over cocktails at the Top of the Yacht bar (who's complaining?).

SEADREAM: YOUR YACHT AWAITS

In fall 2001, Norwegian entrepreneur Atle Brynestad, who founded Seabourn in 1987 and chaired the company for a decade, bought out Carnival Corporation's stake in Seabourn's *Sea Goddess I* and *Sea Goddess II.* He then worked with former Seabourn and Cunard president and CEO Larry Pimentel to form the SeaDream Yacht Club, reintroducing the ships as twin yachts. *SeaDream II* was redesigned and refitted at a Bremerhaven, Germany, shipyard and was unveiled in Miami in February 2002. Her sister ship debuted 2 months later, following her own refurbishment. In early 2009, Pimentel resigned from the company due to fundamental disagreements with management over the direction of the company, and Bob Lepisto, who has been with SeaDream since the beginning, was appointed CEO.

Compared with the other ultraluxury lines, here's how SeaDream rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor					✓
Dining				✓	
Activities				✓	
Children's Program	N/A*				
Entertainment			✓		
Service					✓
Worth the Money					✓

** SeaDream has no children's program.*

The mantra from management is that these vessels are not cruise ships. They are yachts and have been painstakingly renovated to invoke the ambience of your best friend's private vessel, on the theory that cruising is about what happens inside the vessel, and yachting is about what happens outside. Toward this end, deck space has been expanded and refurbished with such touches as queen-size sun beds. The Main Salon is cozy, with fabrics and art handpicked by Linn Brynestad, the owner's spouse. The dress code steers clear of the traditional tux-and-sequins dress-up night by favoring "yacht casual" wear. Some men wear jackets, but never ties. Itineraries are designed so that ships stay overnight once or twice a week so that passengers can enjoy the local nightlife if they wish. Plus, because SeaDream's ports of call tend to be the less commercialized ones that are generally off the megaship main drag, you'll rarely be meandering around a port town with thousands of others (thank goodness). If the ships are anchoring offshore, their size generally enables them to get close enough so that the tender ride between ship and shore is short. And given how few passengers the ships carry, you'll never have to queue up to be shuttled back and forth—it's practically on demand.

With many crewmembers having migrated to SeaDream from the *Goddess* days, meticulous attention to detail and personalized service are still the ships' greatest assets.

PASSENGER PROFILE

Most passengers are in their 40s and 50s, with the line reporting an average age of 47. About 70% are American (with British, Canadians, and other Europeans making up most of the remainder), and are not veteran cruisers. They're the kind who have refined tastes and want top-notch service and gourmet food, but are secure enough to dispense with a stuffy atmosphere. On a sailing Heidi did aboard the *SeaDream I* in the Caribbean, the mix included a fun-loving, middle-aged doctor and his wife from Texas; a 30-something couple-next-door from Pennsylvania, who ran a successful baking business and liked to swig beer from the bottle; a retired travel executive who was clearly used to the good life; a restaurant owner; and a group of well-dressed, hard-drinking friends celebrating a 40th birthday. Many passengers have chartered their own small yachts for a vacation or actually own one. Passengers were friendly and mingled easily, and by day three, alliances had been made and clusters of new friends were enjoying drinks by the pool and dining together in the open-seating restaurants.

The SeaDream yacht experience is most similar to a cruise with Windstar, whose intimate, motorized sailing ships provide casually elegant, yachty jaunts for mostly 40- and 50-somethings to similarly great places in the Caribbean and Europe—though not with SeaDream's all-inclusive price tag. The SeaDream experience is less highbrow and way more playful than Seabourn, whose three 208-passenger ships attract an older, more sober clientele.

A big chunk of the line's business comes from full charters of the ships, often by large (rich) families. Smaller groups can sometimes take advantage of a deal that offers one free cabin for every four booked, up to a maximum of 25 cabins. Groups of 50 are a significant presence on ships this size, so when booking, inquire whether there will be any large groups aboard, to avoid the "in crowd/out crowd" vibe.

DINING

TRADITIONAL Dining is a high point of the SeaDream experience; it's roughly on a par with Windstar's cuisine, and just under Silversea and Seabourn. Daily five-course dinners in the **Dining Salon** include five entrees that change nightly, with a **healthy selection** always among them. Expect delicious dishes such as a hot and tangy prawn and fruit salad; sautéed sea scallops with cauliflower crème, herb lettuce, and potato crisps; and yellowfin tuna steak on roast zucchini and tomato compote. You'll also find a **vegetarian option** and a la carte items such as linguine with pesto and rosemary-marinated lamb chops. The kitchen will prepare **special requests** provided the ingredients are on board. **Local specialties,** such as fresh fish from markets in various ports, are likely to be incorporated into the menu. Open-seating dining is from 7:30 to 9:30pm, and table arrangements include everything from the nine-seat captain's table to cozier places for two (though during the evening rush, it's not easy to snag one). Generally, you'll be seated with other guests unless you don't want to, and by the second or third day of the cruise, many passengers prefer to sit at larger tables with new friends.

There are no formal evenings. Jackets are not required; some men wear them, but many just stick to collared shirts. On Heidi's cruise, passengers' interpretation of the **informal dress code** ranged from a classic navy blue sport jacket to Bermuda shorts and a T-shirt—the latter frowned upon by the ship's manager, but generally overlooked. It's not easy to tell someone who paid several thousand dollars for his cruise to go back to his cabin to change clothes.

Guests can venture "out" for dinner by requesting a spot in advance at one of several private alcoves on Deck 6, or even on the bridge. These special dining ops may not be advertised heavily on board—you'll have to ask for them.

CASUAL The partially covered, open-sided **Topside Restaurant** on Deck 5 serves breakfast and lunch daily, with guests choosing from a buffet or menu.

SNACKS & EXTRAS Room service is available 24 hours a day for those who don't want to pause their DVD player. You'll also find minisandwiches, wraps, pastries, and other snacks throughout the day in the Topside Restaurant's buffet area or at the pool. One afternoon on Heidi's cruise, waiters circulated by the pool at happy hour with trays of bloody marys and homemade minipizzas. For a real treat, you can ask for a generous (and complimentary) jumbo shrimp cocktail whenever the mood strikes; on our last cruise, the craving struck while we were soaking in the hot tub. Caviar is available, though it's no longer complimentary (except on special occasions); a 1-ounce portion goes for $32.

Dining highlights from the old *Sea Goddess* cruises are carried over here, including lavish **beach barbecues,** called the Champagne and Caviar Splash, on Jost Van Dyke and Virgin Gorda (see "Activities," below, for more details). A buffet lunch, served on tables with linen and china, includes grilled shrimp and chicken, pork ribs, and plenty of side dishes.

The line's **open-bar policy** means that unlimited alcoholic beverages are served throughout the vessels, though cabin minifridges are stocked only with complimentary beer and soft drinks. If you want wine and spirits for your minifridge, you'll have to pay. Advance requests for favorite libations are encouraged. Each ship's wine cellar includes some 3,500 bottles, of which an excellent selection is complimentary.

SeaDream Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
SeaDream I	**Caribbean:** 5-, 7-, 9- & 14-night eastern & southern, San Juan to St. Thomas, r/t San Juan, St. Thomas to San Juan, San Juan to Barbados, & Barbados to St. Thomas (Jan–Apr).
SeaDream II	**Caribbean:** 5-, 7- & 9-night eastern & southern, San Juan to St. Thomas, r/t San Juan, St. Thomas to San Juan, San Juan to Antigua, r/t Antigua, Antigua to San Juan, & San Juan to Barbados (Jan–Apr).

ACTIVITIES

If hanging out can be considered an activity, you can do it well on a SeaDream cruise. Who can complain about summoning a waiter from the hot tub for a jumbo shrimp cocktail and a piña colada? The SeaDream experience is about being outdoors. The ship's main social hubs are not the indoor entertainment lounge or library, but out on deck at the Top of the Yacht Bar, Pool Deck, and sunbathing areas, where there are chaise longues, a pair of hammocks, and the line's much-touted ultrafirm **Balinese sun beds.** Upon request, you can even sleep on them under the stars with duvets and pillows. There's also a **golf simulator** up top, and below, a **retractable marina for watersports** and swimming, which operates a couple of hours a day in ports where the ship anchors, which is virtually everywhere in the Caribbean, but fewer ports in Europe. Cabins have DVD players and you can borrow a portable **MP3 player** from the reception desk (there are about 25, and they're preprogrammed with a wide selection of music).

The ships carry along **mountain bikes** for use in port and even **Segway Human Transporters,** those two-wheeled, upright scooters that can be used (at a cost of $49 for 45 min.) when the ship ties up at a dock, which isn't often in the Caribbean.

For those who consider a **massage** a beloved pastime—like we do—the ship's well-equipped spa and gym are very impressive for ships so small. Staffs of eight Thai women run the spas, which feature traditional therapies such as Swedish massage, along with Asian ones. Heidi sampled an excellent Thai massage during which the therapist used her arms and legs, as well as hands, to execute a variety of stretching moves. The adjacent oceanview gym provides up-to-date equipment and daily classes such as tai chi and yoga.

One of the week's highlights is an ultrapopular holdover from the *Sea Goddess* days, the lavish **Champagne and Caviar Splash beach party** thrown on Jost Van Dyke or Virgin Gorda. Guests are tendered ashore by Zodiac inflatable boats to a quiet beach, where chaise longues are set up on the sand and a nice buffet lunch is served in a rustic pavilion. The main event that gets the cameras clicking is when the manager and his assistants wade into the surf with their uniforms on and serve champagne and caviar from a floating surfboard. It appeals to the inner frat boy in all of us, and passengers of all types just loved the whole ritual on a recent cruise. The entire ship was happily treading through the water to partake of a glass (or two or three) of bubbly and a dollop of caviar, reveling in the frivolity of it. The buffet lunch is served on long tables (with linens and china). A pair of kayaks and snorkeling equipment were also provided, though few people had the energy to bother. Nearby, a local vendor was renting paddle boats, windsurfers, and other watercraft.

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

Though the only actual restriction is that children under age 1 are prohibited, these ships are by no means kid-friendly. There are no babysitting services or child-related activities. Teens, though, may enjoy these cruises' emphasis on watersports and unstructured activities. Keep in mind, the standard Yacht Club staterooms can accommodate only three people; the third person/child sleeps on the couch (which doesn't pull out) and generally pays half of the full per-person rate. If you've got a larger family, you'll have to spring for two staterooms. The rate for a child up to age 12 is $100 per day and $200 per day for children over 12; in both cases, it is assumed that they'll be sharing a stateroom with two adults.

ENTERTAINMENT

Evening entertainment is mostly of the socializing-over-drinks variety—and that's how passengers seem to like it. This isn't generally a musical-loving cabaret crowd. On a recent cruise, a **pianist** played after dinner in the Main Salon lounge, while a **guitarist** serenaded diners at the entrance to the restaurant and sometimes afterward up on deck at the **Top of the Yacht bar,** the liveliest spot to hang out before and after dinner. Occasionally, **local bands** are brought on for the night, and there is a **tiny casino** area with two poker tables and a handful of slots. Weather permitting, on 1 night per cruise, a large **movie** screen is set up on deck so that passengers can watch a flick under the stars (with popcorn, of course).

SERVICE

Given the small number of guests and large number of crew, everyone is quick to satisfy whims and commit your name to memory. Make sure that your first drink is your favorite; you may find fresh ones reappearing automatically throughout the evening. The dining room waitstaff is courteous and knowledgeable, though a bit harried; even though dining is open seating, most passengers tend to eat about the same time each evening. As aboard the Silversea ships, cabin bathrooms are stocked with Bulgari amenities and guests all get a complimentary set of frumpy (but comfortable) SeaDream pajamas. **Laundry, dry cleaning,** and **pressing** are available, but there is no self-service laundry.

SeaDream I • SeaDream II

The Verdict

The service, cuisine, and intimacy of the old *Sea Goddess* ships are an even better package, with flexible itineraries and a laid-back atmosphere designed to pry landlubbers from their resorts and out to sea.

SeaDream II *(photo: SeaDream Yacht Club)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	4,260	Passenger/Crew Ratio	1.2 to 1
Passengers (double occ.)	110	Year Launched	
Passenger/Space Ratio	38.7	*SeaDream I*	1984
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	55/0	*SeaDream II*	1985
Crew	95	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	2007/2008

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5) ★★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	5	Dining Options	3.5
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4
Public Comfort/Space	4.5	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	5

If you like a high-quality, sophisticated cruise experience without the formality of the other luxe lines or the crowds of the bigger ships, SeaDream is the answer to your prayers. These former *Sea Goddess* ships, which started sailing in 1984, have occupied their yacht-y luxe niche for more than a quarter century, and they're still a great way to explore the Caribbean and Europe.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Suite	$300	195–450	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS All of the 54 one-room, 195-square-foot, oceanview suites are virtually identical, with the bedroom area positioned alongside the cabin's large window (or portholes in the case of Deck 2 suites) and the sitting area inside—the exact opposite of most ship cabin layouts. During a May 2007 dry dock, the suites on *SeaDream I* were refreshed with new furniture upholstery, curtains, and bedspreads; same deal in 2008 for *SeaDream II*. The standard cabins are a bit bigger than Windstar's, and about 100 square feet smaller than those of Seabourn, Silversea, and Regent. None have balconies. Soundproofing between cabins is good and engine noise minimal, as all cabins are located forward and amidships.

Built in the mid-1980s, these ships have a lot more real wood incorporated into the cabins than you'll see on today's newer ships that sport veneers and synthetics at every turn. Wood cabinetry and moldings are complemented by blue-and-white fabrics to create an appealing nautical look with a modern twist. Each suite has a small sitting area with a couch (that can accommodate a third adult or a child) and an entertainment center that includes a flatscreen TV with CD/DVD player (and wired for Internet access). On her last cruise, Heidi was impressed by the amount of storage space (she never used it all), and the stash of large bottles of water. A minifridge is stocked with sodas and beer (booze from any of the bars and restaurants is included in the rates, but oddly enough, if you want liquor for your minibar, you'll have to pay for it). Bathrooms are compact, as you would expect on ships of this size, but feature huge marble showers with glass doors and a generous supply of Bulgari toiletries. Each cabin comes with a hair dryer and extrathick bathrobes, and all guests are given a set of personalized cotton pajamas with the SeaDream logo to take home. Unlike Silversea and Seabourn, the 24-hour room-service menu is limited to salads and sandwiches, and you cannot order from the restaurant menus.

There are 16 staterooms that are connectable to form eight 390-square-foot Commodore Club Staterooms. The gorgeous, 450-square-foot Owner's Suite has a bedroom, living room, dining area, main bathroom with bathtub and separate oceanview shower, and a guest bathroom.

These ships are not recommended for passengers requiring the use of a wheelchair: Doorways leading to staterooms are not wide enough, many thresholds in public areas are several inches high, and tenders that shuttle passengers from ship to shore in many ports cannot accommodate wheelchairs. Though there are elevators, they don't reach all decks.

PUBLIC AREAS The SeaDream yachts retain much of *Sea Goddess*'s former sophisticated decor, and a recent face-lift spruced things up even more with new carpeting and other touch-ups. Stained wood floors, Oriental carpets, and striking exotic floral arrangements delight the eye. The Main Salon and its small but popular alcove bar is the place for the weekly captain's cocktail party, plus other group events. One deck above is the Piano Bar, and next door are the ship's small casino, a gift shop, and an attractive library furnished with comfy chairs and stocked with everything from books on military history to Oprah Book Club favorites.

By far, the favorite place to socialize is the Top of the Yacht bar amidships on Deck 6, which has been designed with teak decking, rattan furniture, and contrasting blue-striped cushions. The bar area is partially covered and has alcove seating. On this deck, you'll also find a flotilla of queen-size sun beds for reading, sunbathing, or napping; they're slightly elevated at the stern of the ship to allow for uninterrupted ocean viewing. For those who might want to sleep on deck one night, management will allow it and outfit beds with blankets. There's a large collection of original artwork by exclusively Scandinavian artists, placed throughout the ship and commissioned or otherwise chosen by Linn Brynestad.

DINING OPTIONS Dinners are served indoors in the simple but elegant Dining Salon on Deck 2. On 1 or 2 nights during the trip, a festive dinner is served in the open-sided, teak-floored Topside Restaurant on Deck 5, and some special meals are served on the beach during port calls. (See "Dining," earlier, for details.)

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES Because yachting is all about being outdoors, there are great open spaces on the SeaDream ships. Stake an early claim to one of the sun beds because they're prime real estate. Eight of them are aftward on Deck 6, and more are forward, near the golf simulator. Aft on Deck 3 is the attractive pool area, with comfortable lounge chairs and umbrellas, tables, a bar, and, not too far away, a hot tub. It's the place where social passengers gather when the ship departs a port to enjoy the view. A covered deck above has more chairs.

Toward the bow on Deck 4 are the salon and an impressively well-designed and well-equipped spa and gym, with four treadmills with flatscreen TVs, an elliptical machine, two stationary bikes, and free weights (and lowish ceilings if you're on the tall side). Classes include aerobics, yoga, and tai chi. The uninterrupted ocean views add a calming diversion while you're burning calories. The teak-lined spa, the Asian Spa and Wellness Center, has three treatment rooms and features the usual decadent (and pricey) suspects, including wraps, facials, and massages, plus more exotic options such as hot-lava-rock massages, a spice-and-yogurt scrub, and a cucumber-and-aloe wrap. You can prebook treatments online at www.seadreamspa.com.

5 Silversea Cruises

110 E. Broward Blvd., Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301. ✆ **800/722-9955.** Fax 954/522-4499. www.silversea.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL It doesn't get better than Silversea if you're looking for a total luxury experience at sea. From exquisite service and cuisine to such niceties as free-flowing Pommery Brut Royal champagne and Acqua di Parma and Bulgari bath products in the marble cabin bathrooms, these handsome ships offer the best of everything. **Sails to:** Caribbean (plus Europe, Asia, South America, Australia/New Zealand, Africa, transatlantic, world cruise).

THE EXPERIENCE Fine-tuned and genteel, a Silversea cruise caters to guests who are used to the good life, and nothing seems to have been overlooked. The food and service are among the best at sea, and the ships' Italian-style decor is warm and inviting. Tables are set with Christofle silver and Schott-Zwiesel crystal. These are dignified vessels for a dignified crowd that likes to dress for dinner, compare travel dossiers, and plan their next big trip. If you want the VIP treatment 24-7, this is your cruise line.

Pros

- **Doting service:** Gracious and ultraprofessional, the Silversea crew knows how to please well-traveled guests with high expectations.
- **Truly all-inclusive:** An impressive selection of wines and spirits is included in the rates, as are gratuities.
- **Excellent cuisine:** Rivaling the best restaurants ashore, cuisine is as exquisite as it gets at sea. Each ship has two alternative venues for dinner, buffets are bountiful, and the room-service menu is extensive.
- **Large staterooms and great bathrooms:** Most of the line's suites are larger than Seabourn's and Crystal's, and the huge marble bathrooms are the best at sea (along with those on Regent's *Seven Seas Navigator* and *Voyager*).

Cons

- **Stuffy crowd:** Of course, not every guest fits that bill, but expect a good portion of the crowd on any cruise to be . . . reserved.

SILVERSEA: THE CROWN JEWELS

Silversea Cruises was conceived in the early 1990s by the Lefebvre family of Italy, former owners of Sitmar Cruises, a legendary Italian line that was merged into P&O/Princess in the late '80s. Created to cater to discerning travelers looking for a superluxurious cruise experience, the line's four ships were built and outfitted at shipyards in Italy and no expense was spared in their design.

The new line joined Seabourn right at the top of the heap when it introduced the 296-passenger *Silver Cloud* and *Silver Wind* in 1994 and 1995—and, in fact, features such as stateroom balconies and a two-level show lounge actually gave them the edge. With the introduction of the larger, even more impressive *Silver Shadow* and *Silver Whisper* in 2000 and 2001, that bar was raised even higher, with larger staterooms and huge marble bathrooms, dimly lit and romantic cigar lounges, and more entertainment lounges—all in all, the absolute height of style, paired with itineraries that spanned the globe. A concerted effort has been made to play up the line's Italian connections. The ships have specialty Italian restaurants; Italian-made bath amenities come from Acqua di Parma and Bulgari; high-end Italian clothes and accessories are

Compared with the other ultraluxury lines, here's how Silversea rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor					✓
Dining					✓
Activities			✓		
Children's Program	N/A*				
Entertainment		✓			
Service					✓
Worth the Money					✓

** Silversea has no children's program.*

in the boutiques; and bronze statues and reliefs from Italian sculptor Francesco Messina are on loan from a private collection.

In early 2007, Silversea announced its intention to build a new 36,000-ton, 540-passenger ship at Italian shipyard Fincantieri. It's slated to debut in late 2009; and the option for a second ship was also signed. The line also purchased an expedition ship (formerly Society Expedition's *World Discoverer*), and relaunched it in mid-2008 as *HSH Prince Albert II* in tribute to Prince Albert of Monaco, who in 2006 journeyed to the North Pole to draw attention to the effects of global warming on the Arctic regions. The ship currently sails in the Arctic, Antarctica, and the tropical coast of South America.

PASSENGER PROFILE

While Silversea's typical passenger mix is 48-plus, shorter cruises and Caribbean sailings often skew the mix a tad younger, adding at least a handful of 30- and 40-something couples to the pot. Still, the cruise director on a *Silver Whisper* cruise told us that a 30-something honeymoon couple on the previous sailing had cut out halfway through because the crowd and vibe were older and more sedate than they had expected. Typically, about 70% of passengers are American and they're well traveled, well heeled, well dressed, well accessorized, and well into their 50s, 60s, and 70s. Most guests are couples, though singles and small groups of friends traveling together are usually part of the scene, too. Many have cruised with Silversea before; in fact, every single person Heidi met on a recent cruise had sailed with the line at least once, if not many times.

DINING

Foodies should consider Silversea for the food alone. The cuisine is well prepared and presented, and creative chefs continually come up with a wide variety of dishes. Many ingredients are imported from Italy (the pasta, cheese, and Parma ham, for instance) and much of the baked goods—including the excellent focaccia and flat breads—are made right on board. Each ship has a formal open-seating dining room and two more casual options. There are plenty of tables for two in all restaurants, though in the main dining room you may have to wait.

TRADITIONAL While the cuisine in the elegant main dining room (straightforwardly called **The Restaurant**) is not as impressive as that of the more intimate, casual **La Terrazza** (see below), it still serves delicious meals, with entrees such as a duet of

Preview: Silversea's New *Silver Spirit*

Measuring in at 36,000 gross tons and carrying 540 passengers, *Silver Spirit,* Silversea's first new vessel since 2001's *Silver Whisper,* is currently under construction at the Fincantieri shipyard in Ancona, Italy, and is scheduled to join the Silversea fleet in December 2009.

Spirit will be considerably larger than Silversea's existing vessels, the 296-passenger *Silver Cloud* and *Silver Wind* and the 382-passenger *Silver Shadow* and *Silver Whisper.* The extra space will allow introduction of several features not available on the older vessels, including six restaurants including a supper club and Japanese venue, plus a 7,300-square-foot spa and private verandas on 95% of cabins. For 2010, the ship was slated to do itineraries in South America, the Mediterranean, and the Caribbean.

king prawn and halibut with wild-rice cakes, crispy roasted duck, and a penne pasta with spicy tomato, olive, caper, and anchovy sauce. The wine list is excellent, and a pair of complimentary wines is suggested at each meal from more than 40 choices; if you'd like something other than the featured ones, ask and ye shall find. You can also choose one of the wines not included on the complimentary list—a $745 1990 Château Margaux, anyone?

SPECIALTY Two specialty restaurants serve dinner on each ship, both by reservation. Open most evenings for dinner, **La Terrazza** is an intimate spot serving Italian cuisine. Start with a plate of antipasto—fresh *parmigiano* prosciutto, olives, sun-dried tomatoes, and marinated eggplant—before moving on to delicious dishes such as a mushroom tart or buffalo mozzarella with fresh tomato and basil; gnocchi filled with Gorgonzola; and a juicy pork loin. Featured desserts, such as a delicious *millefoglie* (or mille-feuille: puff pastry with cream filling), are paired with a tray of Italian-made biscotti.

The **second alternative restaurant** provides a new twist on cruise dining, offering **menus that pair food with wine**—and not the other way around. Developed in consultation with master sommeliers trained in the member boutique lodgings and restaurants of Relais & Châteaux–Relais Gourmands, the wine menus reflect regions of the world known for their rich viticultural heritage, including France, Italy, northern California, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Sommeliers describe the origin and craft of each vintage, and then present dishes created especially to bring out the wine's full richness. Guests enjoy a different wine with each course, with the extra charge for dinner varying in accordance with the wines presented. On a recent cruise, it was $150 per person, and frequented mostly by European passengers.

CASUAL Burgers, sandwiches, and salads are served poolside at lunchtime, in addition to service in **The Restaurant** and the buffet-style **Terrace Cafe** (which is transformed into La Terrazza in the evenings). Once per cruise, passengers are also invited into the galley for the traditional **galley brunch,** which features more than 100 delectable dishes, from stone crab claws to pickled herring, Hungarian goulash, rabbit a la Provençal, and German bratwurst. A red carpet is rolled out, literally, through the galley, and the chef is on hand to chat with guests about the feast.

SNACKS & EXTRAS The line's **24-hour room-service menu** includes such mouthwatering choices as a snack-size portion of crabmeat served with lime mayonnaise and guacamole, and delicious thin-crust gourmet pizzas. Plus, if you'd rather dine in, you can order off The Restaurant's menu (during its lunchtime and dinnertime operating hours) and have your meal served course by course on a table set with linens and china in your suite. There's an elegant white-gloved tea service in one of the lounges on most days.

ACTIVITIES

Aside from trivia games, card tournaments, stretch and aerobics classes, and bridge tours, Silversea tries to focus on more cerebral pursuits. **Wine-tasting seminars** are excellent. The line's **enrichment lectures** are varied and interesting; at least one guest speaker is featured on every sailing, and speakers have ranged from explorers and adventurers to authors and journalists. **Culinary theme cruises,** offered in partnership with Relais & Châteaux, are hosted by Relais Gourmands chefs and feature demos and tastings.

Other pursuits include language classes, **golf instruction** and driving nets, and computer classes. *Silver Shadow* also has special golf cruises that feature PGA golf pros, golfing excursions, and the latest video teaching technology.

Lighter activities include a dip in the pool or two hot tubs; shopping in the boutiques (which include H. Stern, where you'll find high-end gold, diamond, and gemstone pieces); and surfing in the Internet center. Passengers who travel with their

Silversea Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Silver Cloud	**Caribbean:** 9-night eastern/southern, Fort Lauderdale to Barbados (Mar). 7-night eastern, Barbados to San Juan (Mar). 7-night eastern/southern, r/t San Juan (Mar–Apr). 8-night eastern/southern, r/t San Juan (Mar). 7-night eastern/southern, r/t Barbados (Dec).
Silver Shadow	**Panama Canal:** 16-night, Fort Lauderdale to Los Angeles (Jan). 17-night Los Angeles to Fort Lauderdale (Mar). 15-night, Fort Lauderdale to Los Angeles (Apr). **Hawaii/Polynesia:** 26-night, r/t Los Angeles (Feb). **Caribbean:** 8-night eastern/southern, Fort Lauderdale to Barbados (Mar). 7-night eastern/southern, r/t Barbados (Mar). 7-night eastern, San Juan to Fort Lauderdale (Apr). 11-night eastern/southern, Barbados to San Juan (Apr). **Alaska:** 12-night, Los Angeles to Vancouver (May). 9-night Inside Passage, r/t Vancouver (May–Jul & Sept). 7-night Gulf of Alaska, north- & southbound between Seward/Anchorage and Vancouver (Jun–Aug). 10-night Inside Passage, Vancouver to San Francisco (Jun). 12-night Inside Passage, r/t San Francisco (Jul). 10-night Inside Passage, San Francisco to Vancouver (Jul).
Silver Spirit	**Caribbean:** 9-night eastern/southern, Fort Lauderdale to Barbados (Jan). **Mexican Riviera:** 10-night, Acapulco to Los Angeles (Mar). **Panama Canal:** 17- or 20-night, Los Angeles to Fort Lauderdale or New York (Apr). 7-night eastern/southern, r/t Barbados (Nov). 9-night eastern/southern, east- & westbound between Barbados and Fort Lauderdale (Nov–Dec). 10-night eastern, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Nov). 14-night eastern/southern, r/t Fort Lauderdale (Dec).
Silver Whisper	**Canada/New England:** 10-night, north- & southbound between New York and Montréal (Sept), r/t New York (Oct). **Bermuda/Caribbean:** 10-night, New York to Barbados (Oct).

laptops can take advantage of Wi-Fi throughout the ships. **Onboard cellphone service** is also now an option. Overall, though, these ships are low key (don't expect music on the Pool Deck, for instance) and guests are left to their own devices when it comes to keeping busy—just the way most guests like it. Reading, dozing, and sipping cool drinks seem to keep most of them happily occupied.

The ships' Balinese-inspired spa beckons with its flower-strewn copper foot bowls, warm massage stones, and other Asian-inspired treatments. To avoid waiting in line on the first day of the cruise to make your appointments, you can now book your treatments via the line's website up to 48 hours before your cruise. You can also prebook **shore excursions** online up to the week before sailing.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

These ships are not geared to children, though every so often, one or two are aboard. Babysitting may be arranged with an available crewmember (no guarantee); otherwise, no activities or services are provided specifically for children. The minimum age for sailing is 1 year.

ENTERTAINMENT

For evening entertainment, the ships each have a small casino; a combo entertaining in the nightclub adjacent to the show lounge; a pianist in another lounge; and dozens of in-cabin movies, including oldies and current films. On warm-weather cruises, there are movies shown on deck by the pool and dancing under the stars at the weekly barbecue buffet on deck. There are also small-scale song-and-dance revues in the two-level show lounges, plus magic acts, singers, instrumentalists, jugglers, and sometimes performances by local folkloric groups. Popular **theme cruises** from time to time feature classical musicians, guest chefs, and renowned wine experts conducting demonstrations and talks. The pace is calm, and that's the way most Silversea guests like it; most are perfectly content to spend their after-dinner hours with cocktails and conversation. Occasionally, depending on the crowd, the **Panorama Lounge** (on *Whisper*) or **The Bar** (on either ship) attracts a contingent of revelers who dance and drink into the wee hours.

SERVICE

Announced in early 2009, all suites now include the services of a butler who will unpack your bags, draw your bath, make spa or dinner reservations, put together an in-suite cocktail party for you and the maharajah, or arrange a private car at the next port (used to be a perk reserved for top suites only).

The gracious staff knows how to please. Staff members are friendly and remember your name, but are never obtrusive or pushy. Waitstaff and stewards are as discreet as the guests are, and chances are you'll never hear the word *no.* The room-service menu is extensive and at dinnertime you can also order from The Restaurant's menu and have it served in your suite, course by course. Unlimited wines, champagne, spirits, and soft drinks are included in the rates, as are gratuities. Hot and cold canapés are served in the lounges before dinner, and Godiva chocolates are left on suite pillows on formal evenings. For an extra charge ($100–$150 per person), you can take advantage of flexible embarkation and debarkation, getting into your suite as early as 10:30am on embarkation day and debarking as late as 5pm on the last day.

Laundry and **dry cleaning** are available. There are also **self-service laundry** rooms.

Silver Shadow • Silver Whisper

Silver Shadow *(photo: Silversea Cruises)*

The Verdict

These handsome, well-run ships are perfect for those looking for a small-ship experience with superb dining and service.

Specifications

Size (in tons)	28,258	Year Launched	
Passengers (double occ.)	382	*Silver Shadow*	2000
Passenger/Space Ratio	74	*Silver Whisper*	2001
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	194/157	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Crew	295	*Silver Shadow*	2007
Passenger/Crew Ratio	1.3 to 1	*Silver Whisper*	2007

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	5	Dining Options	5
Appearance & Upkeep	5	Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities	4
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	5	Enjoyment Factor	5

With *Silver Shadow* and *Silver Whisper*, Silversea set the bar very high for the rest of the ultraluxe lines. They're small enough to be intimate, but large enough to offer a classy two-story show lounge, dark and romantic cigar lounge, three dining venues, an impressive spa and gym, and some really great suites, in addition to the fine service and cuisine provided fleetwide.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Suite	$377	287–1,435*	yes	yes	yes	yes

** Includes balconies.*

CABINS The suites aboard *Shadow* and *Whisper* leave nothing to be desired. With a chilled bottle of Pommery Brut Royal at your side, just settle down in the comfy sitting area and bask in the ambient luxury. Private balconies are attached to three-quarters of the plush staterooms, which measure a roomy 287 square feet or more. They're done up in an ultrapleasant color scheme focused on rich blues and soft golds, along with coppery-brown wood tones. Each suite has a walk-in closet, minibar, DVD player, sitting area, lighted dressing table with hair dryer, writing desk, and wonderful marble-covered bathrooms stocked with Acqua di Palma or Bulgari toiletries (the stewardess comes around at the beginning of the cruise to ask your preference, though you can change your mind at any time). The separate shower stall and long bathtub, along with double sinks, make these among the best loos at sea; only Regent's *Seven Seas Navigator* and *Voyager* have bathrooms this good. All beds have feather-down

pillows and duvets, and Egyptian cotton linens. The largest of the four two-bedroom Grand Suites are really something else, measuring 1,435 square feet with three bathrooms, a pair of walk-in closets, an entertainment center, two verandas, and a living room and dining area. All suites have flatscreen televisions and plush mattresses and bedding.

Two staterooms are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS The low-key main lobby area, where the purser's desk resides, branches out into a pair of attractive, four-deck-high staircases, with shiplike railings, and corridors done in a mix of Wedgwood blue and golden peach fabrics and carpeting, along with warm caramel wood tones. The impressive **two-story show lounge** has tiered seating and lots of cozy clusters of chairs; **The Bar,** just outside the show lounge's first level, can be a social hub with its long bar, dance floor, and plenty of seating. The **Observation Lounge,** high on Deck 10 overlooking the bow, is a great place to relax, read, and watch the scenery unfold through floor-to-ceiling windows. You'll find a radar screen, astronomical maps, binoculars, and reference books, and, during the day, a self-service coffee, tea, and juice bar. On Deck 8 at the stern, the windowed **Panorama Lounge** also affords great sea views and lots of comfortable seating. By day, enjoy a continental breakfast or high tea here, while by night the lounge becomes an intimate nightspot, with a pianist serenading dancers. The **Humidor cigar lounge** is a dark, cozy, and plush spot for cocktails—even nonsmokers can't help but be drawn to the ambience, while cigar lovers should enjoy the walk-in humidor. There's also a small casino and attached bar, a card room with felt-topped tables, a boutique, and a pool bar.

DINING OPTIONS In **The Restaurant,** the main dining room, a live trio plays romantic oldies on some nights, and guests are invited to take a spin around the small dance floor. There are plenty of tables for two, though during popular times you may have a short wait. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served here in high style, while a more casual buffet-style breakfast and lunch are served in the indoor/outdoor **La Terrazza.** Service is doting even in the casual restaurant, with waiters rushing to carry plates to your table, serve drinks, and clear things off just moments after you finish. A special pasta dish is made to order by a chef for guests who do lunch in La Terrazza. Come evening, it has a wonderful Italian menu that focuses on different Italian regions throughout the cruise; reservations are required. A third dining spot has special wine-pairing menus (see "Dining," earlier) in an intimate setting on deck 7 next to the Terrace Cafe.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES A combination of old-style wooden deck chairs and brand-new aluminum and blue canvas deck chairs line the open decks. Unfortunately, jolting grass-green Astroturf covers the entirety of decks 9 and 10 (a teak-colored synthetic flooring would have been a better choice). There are plenty of places to retire with a good book or take an afternoon snooze, either near the pool and hot tubs on Deck 8 (which is teak, by the way), or at the stern on that deck. There's also a golf driving cage and shuffleboard.

The spa, gym, and hair salon occupy much of Deck 10, and are spacious for a ship of this size. There's a separate workout room with exercise machines, plus a separate aerobics room.

Silver Cloud

The Verdict

Big enough to offer a two-story show lounge and several other entertainment outlets, and cozy enough that you'll feel like you practically have the vessel to yourself, this ship is an absolute dream.

Silver Cloud *(photo: Silversea Cruises)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	16,800	Crew	210
Passengers (double occ.)	296	Passenger/Crew Ratio	1.4 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio	56.8	Year Launched	1994
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	148/110	Last Refurbishment/Update	2007

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

★★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4.5	Dining Options	5
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Gym & Spa Facilities	4.5
Public Comfort/Space	4.5	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	5

Superintimate and large enough to have multiple entertainment venues, two restaurants, and lots of outdoor deck space, sister ships *Silver Cloud* and *Silver Wind* (the *Wind* is spending 2010 in Europe and Africa) were built in the mid-1990s, just in time to get in on must-have ship fashions such as balconies. At press time, *Silver Cloud* is scheduled for a major makeover in May 2009 (which sister *Silver Wind* got in late 2008), which will create a larger spa and gym, a new observation lounge, and eight new suites, as well as renovating all suite bathrooms and sprucing up cabins, public rooms, and corridors to bring their decor in line with what's being created for the line's newest ship, *Silver Spirit.*

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Suite	$377	240–1,314*	yes	yes	yes	yes

** Includes balconies.*

CABINS Like her fleetmates, the *Cloud* is an all-suite ship, with balconies on more than three-quarters of the staterooms. All 148 suites have sitting areas, roomy walk-in closets, bathtubs, vanities, new flatscreen TVs and DVD players, stocked minibars, Acqua di Palma or Bulgari toiletries, and plush mattresses and bedding; while the top of the lot, the Grand Suites, have two bedrooms, two living rooms, three televisions, two bathrooms, and a full-size Jacuzzi tub. Color schemes revolve around creamy beige fabrics and golden brown wood. Swirled peachy-gray marble covers bathrooms from head to toe, and though indulgent enough, the bathrooms don't hold a flame to the larger, simply decadent loos on newer fleetmate *Silver Shadow.* Goose-down

pillows ensure a good night's rest. A face-lift in May 2009 saw the addition of four new Medallion suites on Deck 8, four new suites on Deck 7, plus, in all suites, new flatscreen TVs, furniture, carpeting, drapes, and bathroom fixtures and finishings.

Two staterooms are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS Public areas inside and out are spacious and open. High tea is served by day in the windowed Panorama Lounge, which at night hosts piano entertainment. Magic and other acts are performed in the attractive two-story show lounge, and, on most nights, a dance band plays oldies or a DJ spins in the intimate and dimly lit adjacent bar. There's a small casino, too, plus boutiques where you can spend your winnings, including an H. Stern fine jewelry shop with the requisite gold-and-diamond-studded watches.

DINING OPTIONS The formal, open-seating dining room, called **The Restaurant,** is delicately decorated in pale pink and gold, and elegant candlelit tables are set with heavy crystal glasses, chunky Christofle silverware, and doily-covered silver show plates. The indoor/outdoor **La Terrazza** cafe, where buffet-style breakfast and lunch are served, is transformed into a nightly spot for more casual evening dining, featuring a scrumptious Italian menu.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES There are a pool and two hot tubs. The small spa provides a variety of massages and facials. The oceanview gym occupies a roomy space by itself way up on Deck 9 (where an observation lounge used to reside) on the far-forward part of the deck (oddly, it's not attached to the ship's interior, so you must go out on deck to enter), though at press time the ship was slated to undergo a multimillion-dollar renovation of this area. When completed, a new two-floor glass elevator will connect decks 8 and 9. There will be an observation lounge at the bow of Deck 9, plus just behind it a new spa with five treatment rooms, salon, and fitness center (similar to the layout of the *Shadow* and *Whisper*).

8

Small Ships, Sailing Ships & Adventure Cruises

Aside from the fact that they both sail in water, mainstream cruise ships and the small ships in this chapter have hardly anything in common. Whereas big ships allow you to see a region while immersed in a resortlike onboard atmosphere, small ships allow you to see it from the waterline, without distraction from anything that's not an inherent part of the locale—no glitzy interiors, no big shows or loud music, no casinos, no spas, and no crowds either, as the majority of these ships carry fewer than 100 passengers. Whether sailing through Alaska's coastal wilderness, along the Erie Canal or the Columbia River, or between tiny islands in the Caribbean or the Sea of Cortez, you're part of a destination from the minute you wake up until the minute you fall asleep, and for the most part, you're left alone to form your own opinions.

Of the lines reviewed in this chapter, most operate small, motorized **coastal and river cruisers** that are like floating B&Bs, with a main public lounge, a dining room, and little else besides cabins and open decks. A few of these lines also operate slightly larger ships with deep drafts that are suitable for longer open-sea cruises. Four of the lines we review—Star Clippers, Windstar, Sea Cloud, and the independently owned Maine Windjammers—operate honest-to-God **sailing ships,** the first three with a yachtlike vibe, the latter more like summer camp for adults.

Beyond these physical distinctions, the experience provided by all these lines breaks down into two main subcategories: **soft-adventure cruises,** which are generally arranged around activities like hiking, kayaking, tide pooling, and snorkeling, plus visits to out-of-the-way ports; and **port-to-port cruises,** which mix days in port with days spent visiting great natural sites.

We absolutely love the small-ship experience—in fact, it's our favorite way to sail—but there are a few caveats: (1) **don't expect luxury,** as everything aboard the majority of these ships is pretty basic; (2) **stay away if you're not a self-starter,** since these ships offer few or no organized activities; (3) **stay away if you're weak in the stomach,**

The Scoop on Small-Ship Tonnage

When reading the reviews in this chapter, bear in mind that small-ship lines often measure their ships' **gross register tonnage** or GRTs (a measure of internal space, not actual weight) differently than the large lines. There's not even a definite standard within the small-ship market, so to compare ship sizes it's best to just look at the number of passengers aboard. Also note that where GRTs measures are nonstandard, **passenger/space measurements** are impossible to calculate accurately.

Frommer's Ratings at a Glance: The Small-Ship Lines

1 = poor **2** = fair **3** = good **4** = excellent **5** = outstanding

	Enjoyment Factor	Dining	Activities	Children's Program	Entertainment	Service	Worth the Money
American Cruise Line	4	5	2	N/A	3	4	4
Cruise West	4	3	4	N/A	2	4	4
Lindblad Expeditions	5	4	5	N/A	2	4	4
Maine Windjammers*	5	3	3	N/A	2	3	5
Star Clippers	5	4	4	N/A	3	4	5
Windstar	5	4	2	N/A	2	5	4

Note: Cruise lines have been graded on a curve that compares them only with the other lines in the Small Ships, Sailing Ships & Adventure Cruises category. See chapter 5 for the ratings methodology. None of the lines and vessels in this chapter offers a children's program. Lines we've covered in mini-reviews have not been rated. * Because the Maine schooners are all owner-operated, programs vary significantly. These ratings should be taken only as a general indication of fleetwide quality.

as these ships tend to pitch and roll when they hit rough water; (4) **families beware**—these are not ships for kids; (5) **wheelchair users beware too,** as only the four American Cruise Lines ships and Cruise West's *Spirit of '98* and *Spirit of Oceanus* are fully or partially accessible; and (6) **stay away if you're looking for a bargain**—'cause with only a few exceptions (such as the Maine Windjammers), small-ship cruises are among the more expensive cruise options, though on the plus side, the onboard costs of these trips tend to be less, and sometimes include excursions.

A NOTE ON LINE/SHIP RATINGS Because the small-ship experience is so completely different from the megaship experience, we've had to adjust our ratings. For instance, because all but a tiny fraction of these ships have just one dining room for all meals, we can't judge them by the same standard we use for ships with 5 or 10 different restaurants. So, we've set the default **Dining Options** rating for these ships at 3, or "good," with points deducted if a restaurant is particularly uncomfortable or ugly, and points added for any options above and beyond. Similarly, we've changed the "Gym, Spa & Sports Facilities" rating to **Adventure & Fitness Options** to reflect the fact that on small ships the focus is on what's outside, not inside. Options covered in this category might include kayaks, trips by inflatable launch, bow-landing capability, and frequent hiking, tide-pooling, and/or snorkeling trips.

DRESS CODES The word is *casual.* Depending on the region sailed, polo shirts, khakis or shorts, and a fleece pullover and Gore-Tex shell will pretty much take care of you all week. On warm-weather cruises, consider bringing a pair of aqua-socks or rubber sandals, as you may be going ashore in rubber landing craft and have to step out into the surf.

1 Mini-Review: American Canadian Caribbean Line

461 Water St., Warren, RI 02885. ✆ **800/556-7450** or 401/247-0955. Fax 401/247-2350. www.accl-smallships.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL A family-owned New England line, ACCL operates tiny, no-frills ships that attract a well-traveled, extremely casual, and down-to-earth older crowd. It's a "what you see is what you get" experience: friendly, homespun, and visiting places few other ships go. **Sails to:** U.S./Canada river/coastal cruises, Intracoastal Waterway, Caribbean, Central America.

THE EXPERIENCE ACCL began in 1966 when late Rhode Island shipbuilder Luther Blount realized there was a demand for small-ship sailing on the rivers, canals, and coast of New England and Canada. Over the years, his company's vessels have gone well beyond their regional home. Today, many of ACCL's almost universally older passengers (average age around 72) have sailed with the line before, and appreciate its casualness, its lack of glitz and gimmicks, its early-to-bed lifestyle, and its "just us folks" features such as a BYOB policy. (A real money saver for passengers, who can stock up in port and keep their bottles in the bar area, labeled with their cabin number. Tonic and soda are free.)

Built in 1997 and 1998, the line's three vessels—the 100-passenger twins ***Grande Caribe*** ★★★ and ***Grande Mariner*** ★★★ and the older, 84-passenger ***Niagara Prince*** ★★★—are as basic as cruise ships come, with tiny, spartan cabins; no-fuss decor; miniscule head-style cabin bathrooms; and only two public rooms (a lounge and a dining room). But no one expects luxury on these cruises. Instead, ACCL cruises are all about the real life of the regions it visits, with most activities oriented toward exploring ports and natural areas. Some 85% to 90% of cruises sail in domestic waters, concentrating on visits to historically rich Colonial ports and plant- and

American Canadian Caribbean Line Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Grande Caribe	**Caribbean/Central America:** 11-night, r/t Belize City (Jan–Feb). **Bahamas:** 11-night "out islands," r/t Nassau (Mar–Apr). **Atlantic Coast:** 7-night Antebellum South, between Jacksonville, FL, and Charleston, SC (Apr–May). 14-night coastal waterways, Jacksonville to Warren, RI (May). **Canada/New England:** 7-night, r/t Warren, RI (Jun). 15-night Canadian Maritimes, r/t Warren (Jul). 5-night New England Islands, r/t Warren (Aug). 12-night Erie Canal/Saguenay River, r/t Warren (Sept). 12-night fall foliage, r/t Warren (Sept–Oct).
Grande Mariner	**Great Lakes:** 15-night, between Chicago, IL, and Warren, RI (May, Jul). 6-night, r/t Chicago (Jun–Jul). **Canada/New England:** 5-night New England Islands, r/t Warren, RI (Aug). 12-night Erie Canal/Saguenay River, r/t Warren (Sept). 12-night fall foliage, r/t Warren (Sept–Oct).
Niagara Prince	**Middle America:** 9-, 11- & 14-night "Historic Rivers," sailing between New Orleans; Knoxville and Nashville, TN; and Chicago (Apr–Jun). **Great Lakes:** 15-night, Chicago, IL, to Warren, RI (Jun). **Canada/New England:** 7-night Maine Coast, r/t Portland, ME (Aug). 7-night, r/t Warren, RI (Aug). 11-night Hudson River/Lake Champlain, r/t Warren (Sept–Oct).

wildlife-rich natural areas. Innovative exploratory features aboard built into both ships help them go where few others can: a shallow draft and retractable wheelhouse that allow them to sail through shallow canals and under low bridges, bow ramps so they can pull right up to pristine dockless beaches, and a platform in the stern for swimming and launching the ships' glass-bottom boats.

Onboard activities and entertainment are usually limited to occasional informal lectures, a few printed quizzes, cooking demonstrations, card playing, and movies from the ship's video collection. Meals are well prepared and all-American, but limited and not terribly inspiring. The daily menu, with selections for all three meals, is posted every morning on the blackboard in the dining room. There's only one entree per meal, so anyone wanting an alternative must notify the kitchen before 10am. Owing to the average passenger age, ACCL cooks try to keep things low in salt and fat. Service by the staff of young Americans (many from ACCL's home state of Rhode Island) is casual and friendly.

These ships won't appeal to the vast majority of young couples, singles, honeymooners, and families. Children under age 14 are prohibited, and the line offers no children's facilities or activities, nor any particularly active activities. Very tall people should also stay away, as ceilings on all ACCL ships are set at not much more than 6 feet 4 inches.

ACCL is one of the less expensive of the small-ship lines, with per diems usually starting around $265.

2 American Cruise Lines

741 Boston Post Rd., Ste. 200, Guilford, CT 06437. ✆ **800/814-6880.** www.americancruiselines.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL Part cruise, part Rotary Club meeting, part historical tour, Connecticut-based American Cruise Lines operates four U.S.-flagged vessels with unusually large cabins, a congenial ambience, and an emphasis on American history and culture. Life on board is comfortable, reserved, and so hassle-free that many passengers don't even lock their cabin doors. If you want to bring a guest on board for dinner one night when in port, simply tell the cruise director. If you decide not to go on a shore excursion you signed up for, don't worry: If you don't show up, you don't get billed. **Sails to:** U.S. coastal cruises from Maine to Florida.

THE EXPERIENCE Take some great East Coast destinations, throw in some very comfortable small ships, add a few enrichment lectures and complimentary cocktails and a boatload of uniformly older passengers, and you end up with American Cruise Lines. Operating exclusively along the Eastern seaboard, the company's four ships are designed to poke into the smallest and most scenic ports, docking among sailboats at marinas or within a few blocks of museums, shops, and historic districts. Itineraries are port intensive, with the ship underway for only a few hours in the morning or afternoon, usually putting in to the evening's port before dinnertime and spending the night at dock.

Neither a luxury cruise nor an adventure cruise, the company falls into a pleasant niche that succeeds in large part because its ships are far younger and roomier than the competition's, boasting the largest cabins in the small-ship market (save for those aboard Cruise West's *Spirit of Oceanus*), many of them with balconies. This appeals to passengers who want the comforts of a shrunken cruise ship and will gladly pay for the extra space. Guest lecturers provide some enrichment, helping passengers learn about their destination, and chefs from the Culinary Institute of America prepare good regional selections.

Pros

- **America the beautiful:** From Florida's Okeechobee Swamp to Maine's rocky coast, ACL ships sail wonderful coastal itineraries off limits to larger, foreign-flagged ships, and spend every night in port.
- **Roomy rooms with a view:** Cabins are the largest by far in the small-ship category, and almost half of them feature balconies—a first for this type of coastal ship, and an exclusive to ACL. No other small-ship line offers them fleetwide.
- **Have a drink:** The company tries for an upscale feel, and complimentary drinks go a long way in making the cruise seem a bit more luxurious.
- **Totally smoke-free:** ACL is the only line in this book that's 100% smoke-free on all of its ships. Smoking is prohibited everywhere inside and even on all outside decks.
- **Hassles? Not here:** ACL works hard to keep things straightforward, relaxed, and sensible, even to the point of letting passengers invite friends on board for dinner. Everything that seems like it should be simple at other companies, but isn't, is here.

Cons

- **A bit too staid:** In the end, the ships can be just a little too quiet.
- **Limited activities:** While the ships are comfortable, there isn't much choice in activities—not even any nature hikes.

AMERICAN CRUISE LINES: HASSLE-FREE AMERICANA

If only every company got a second chance. Originally formed in the late 1970s, American Cruise Lines operated more or less successfully until new ownership drove it into the ground in the late 1980s. Jump forward to 2000, and the original owner decides to jump back into the business. Rather than reinventing the wheel, he uses the same name, the same basic ship design, similar itineraries, and even the same logo. This time around, the formula seems to be working well and the company has grown quickly. Since its reincarnation, it's launched four ships built right in its own shipyard on the Chesapeake Bay.

PASSENGER PROFILE

Make no mistake about it: American Cruise Line passengers are older, and then some. The company's cozy, low-impact, American style of cruising suits them perfectly, and the fact that each ACL ship has an elevator linking all the decks (a rarity in the small-ship world) is a big draw. Hailing from all over the country, passengers generally appreciate changing for cocktail hour, with about half the men wearing a jacket and/or tie. They are also the types who readily wear the provided name tags for the entire week and don't mind visiting four historic homes in one cruise.

Compared with the other small-ship lines, here's how ACL rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor				✓	
Dining					✓
Activities		✓			
Children's Program	N/A				
Entertainment			✓		
Service				✓	
Worth the Money				✓	

In port, slightly less than half tend to explore the town independently, combing antiques shops or just strolling along Main Street. Well educated and usually well heeled, they are eager to learn about the region and enthusiastically attend the nightly lecture. With diverse cruising backgrounds (from luxe Seabourn to mainstream Princess), they do not necessarily expect five-star service, but they do want comfy, spacious cabins along with the conveniences and camaraderie of a small ship. A very high percentage consists of repeaters, who collect the line's various itineraries like game pieces.

DINING

Situated on the lowest deck all the way at the stern, each ship's pleasant but uninspiring dining room is surrounded on three sides by windows that afford a good view of the passing scenery. Because all the tables seat six, you end up meeting someone new most nights, and it doesn't take long before you've dined with everyone on board.

The usually straightforward, unfancy meals can be surprisingly good. **Seafood** frequently appears on the menu, including local specialties like Maryland crab cakes on Chesapeake Bay cruises or lobster in Maine, along with seasonal flavors such as butternut squash or apple pie. In order to minimize waste, waiters tell you at breakfast what's for lunch and dinner, and you choose what you're going to eat for the rest of the day—although at the last minute, plenty of passengers change their minds. A choice of two entrees is available nightly, along with three appetizers.

Lunch options might include a ham sandwich on a baguette with apples and melted brie or pork loin with goat cheese and onion. While there is no official vegetarian choice, tasty salads often appear on the menu, and special requests can always be accommodated if you let the line know in advance.

SNACKS & EXTRAS Fresh-baked cookies appear at 10am, and everyone gathers in the main lounge at 5:30pm for complimentary drinks at the daily **cocktail hour.** By 9pm, just as the lecture is finishing, trays of **root beer floats and ice-cream sundaes** appear, no matter that it's only 2 hours after dinner.

The ships do not provide room service.

Pearl Seas Cruises in 2010? Any Takers?

For several years, we've been hearing about new line **Pearl Seas Cruises** (✆ **800/983-7462;** www.pearlseascruises.com), a new venture of American Cruise Lines that's supposed to provide a "luxury adventure" small-ship experience. Trouble is, the cruise line still has no ship, large or small. Originally scheduled for a spring 2008 launch, the 210-passenger *Pearl Mist* is still in limbo at press time, a victim of disputes between ACL and the builder, Halifax Shipyard Ltd. As of this writing, the line's schedule shows a start-up in May 2010, but whether that will hold is anyone's guess. If it does, expect a ship that offers large balcony staterooms (302–580 sq. ft.), an onboard enrichment program, a spa, six lounges, and an elevator, and offers cruises in the Caribbean, the Canadian Maritimes, Newfoundland, the Great Lakes, and New England.

American Cruise Lines Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
American Eagle	**Chesapeake Bay:** 7-night, r/t Baltimore (Jun–Nov). **Mid-Atlantic Inland Passage:** 7-night, Baltimore to Charleston (Nov).
American Glory	**Great Rivers of Florida:** 7-night, r/t Jacksonville (Mar & Nov–Dec). **Antebellum South:** 7-night, between Jacksonville, FL, and Charleston, SC (Apr–May & Nov–Dec). **Mid-Atlantic Inland Passage:** 7-night, Jacksonville to Charleston (May) & Baltimore to Charleston (Nov). **Chesapeake Bay:** 7-night, r/t Baltimore (May & Oct). **New England Islands:** 7-night, r/t Providence, RI (Jun). **Maine Coast & Harbors:** 7-night, r/t Portland, ME (Jun–Jul). **Grand New England:** 10-night, between Providence, RI, and Bangor, ME (Jul–Sept). **Hudson Fall Foliage:** 7-night, r/t New York (Sept–Oct).
American Spirit	**Antebellum South:** 7-night, between Jacksonville, FL, and Charleston, SC (Mar–May & Nov–Dec). **Mid-Atlantic Inland Passage:** 7-night, Jacksonville to Charleston (May) & Baltimore to Charleston (Nov). **Chesapeake Bay:** 7-night, r/t Baltimore (May–Nov). **New England Islands:** 7-night, r/t Providence, RI (May–Jun). **Philadelphia & the Potomac:** 7-night, between Philadelphia and Washington, DC (Jun–Jul).
American Star	**Antebellum South:** 7-night, between Jacksonville, FL, and Charleston, SC (Apr–May & Nov–Dec). **Mid-Atlantic Inland Passage:** 7-night, Jacksonville to Charleston (May), Charleston to Baltimore (May) & Baltimore to Charleston (Nov). **Chesapeake Bay:** 7-night, r/t Baltimore (May–Jun & Oct). **New England Islands:** 7-night, r/t Providence, RI (Jul–Sept). **Hudson Fall Foliage:** 7-night, r/t Providence & r/t New York (Oct). **Great Rivers of Florida:** 7-night, r/t St. Augustine (Dec).

ACTIVITIES

Forget art auctions or poolside games; you won't even find such low-impact activities as dance lessons aboard these sedate ships. In the main lounge, passengers might read or play a quiet board game, while you're sure to find at least one game of bridge in the two smaller lounges. Most passengers seem content to just sit on deck and chat. **Guest lecturers** speak most evenings, and spend days pointing out passing sights. On one night, a local musician might be brought on board for a concert, or bingo could be slotted in place of the nightly lecture. Besides an occasional documentary shown in the lounge, a tour of the ship's bridge, or a once-per-week teatime, there really aren't any other organized activities, although some summer itineraries may feature **kite flying** one afternoon from the stern. In port, about half the passengers choose the reasonably priced **shore excursions,** which are usually bus tours to museums, areas of natural beauty, or historic homes. Active excursions simply aren't offered, which is just fine for this crowd.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

This is a cruise line for older adults, so children are extremely rare. A few families may sail on the summer New England itineraries, but the ships have no kids' programs or activities.

ENTERTAINMENT

Entertainment is limited to nightly lectures, the occasional entertainer brought aboard for an evening to sing regional songs, and a satellite TV set up in the corner of the main lounge, tuned to football. This is a line for self-starters.

SERVICE

Because of the Passenger Vessel Services Act (which requires ships to be U.S. flagged and U.S. staffed if they want to sail all-U.S. itineraries), ACL's crews are all fresh-faced, college-age American kids who decided to try an unusual summer job. Mostly enthusiastic and genuine, they try hard and are eager to please, even if the finer points of service don't come naturally: Being addressed by your waiter as "Sweetie" every once in awhile only adds to the charm. A maitre d' keeps a watchful eye over the restaurant operations to make sure his staff is on the right track.

Tipping can be charged to your onboard account, with a relatively steep recommended amount of $17.85 per person, per day.

American Eagle • American Glory • American Spirit • American Star

The Verdict

Simple but comfortable, these ships were built to nestle into small coves and ports along the East Coast, and their large cabins, numerous balconies, and multiple lounges have really raised the standard for the U.S. coastal fleet.

American Spirit *(photo: ACL)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)		Crew	
Eagle/Glory	86*	*Eagle/Glory*	18
Spirit/Star	97*	*Spirit/Star*	26
Passengers (double occ.)		Passenger/Crew Ratio	
Eagle/Glory	49	*Eagle/Glory*	2.7 to 1
Spirit/Star	100	*Spirit/Star*	3.8 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio		Year Launched	
Eagle/Glory	N/A*	*American Eagle*	2000
Spirit/Star	N/A*	*American Glory*	2002
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins		*American Spirit*	2005
Eagle	28/6	*American Star*	2007
Glory	27/14	Last Major Refurbishment	N/A
Spirit/Star	48/27		

* *See note on p. 315 regarding small-ship tonnage and passenger/space measurements.*

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5) ★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	5	Dining Options	3
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Adventure & Fitness Options	2
Public Comfort/Space	4	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	3	Enjoyment Factor	4

American Cruise Lines' four vessels were all built at the line's own shipyard in Salisbury, Maryland, and while they're a bit boxy on the outside, they're refreshingly large and comfortable within, with a decor that's simple and pleasant, if a bit dull. Numerous floor-to-ceiling windows surround the main lounge, and everywhere there are large windows for viewing the passing scenery. Except for their varying sizes (the still-small *Spirit* and *Star* are twice as large as the tiny *Eagle* and *Glory*), the ships are virtually identical, right down to the carpet patterns and furniture. Many passengers find the greater intimacy of the smaller ships a plus, equating fewer passengers with smaller tour groups when in port. Others find that the larger complement of *Spirit* and *Star* means twice as many possibilities for striking up a friendship.

The ships' shallow drafts allow passage up small rivers straight into the heart of town, where port facilities might look like they were designed for a kayak rather than a cruise ship—in one port, we actually sent the ship's mooring lines to a tree in a park rather than to the usual iron bollards. This attitude of keeping things simple extends on board as well. Forget electronic ID cards to get you on or off the ship; here, the crew just recognizes everyone. Rather than waiting for scheduled sailing times, the ships often just sail when everyone is back aboard. A small boat hung from the stern can be used to tender passengers ashore in the very rare ports where the ship doesn't dock. It's also occasionally used for bird-watching excursions.

Because the itineraries always hug the coast, there are rarely any waves or motion to speak of, so these cruises are popular with those who worry about seasickness. On the occasional exposed sea passages, however, even the smallest waves make these unstabilized ships bounce around.

Mid-2010 will see the launch of the 104-passenger *Independence,* ACL's fifth newbuild but its first to incorporate stabilizers, which will make it more comfortable on coastal sailings—including summer cruises on the Maine coast.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Outside	$471	225	no	yes	no	yes

CABINS If there is one thing that really differentiates American Cruise Lines from other coastal competitors, it's the cabins. Rather than the closet-size boxes usually found on similar-size American ships, these cabins average 225 square feet—bigger than standard megaship cabins, and nearly twice the size offered by main regional competitor American Canadian Caribbean Line. Cabins are comfortable, clean, and pleasant—not to mention bright, thanks to large picture windows that actually slide open and to the narrow but serviceable balconies (you get one or the other). As in the public areas, though, their decor isn't exactly stylish. Each cabin comes with a large writing desk, decent storage space, bedside tables, and a satellite TV that gets about 20

channels. Bathrooms are very roomy, with excellent water pressure. Cabins on the older *Eagle* and *Glory* are a touch smaller than those on *Spirit* and *Star,* especially on the forward end of the lowest deck, where the curvature of the bow reduces square footage.

Each ship has several cabins for solo passengers (a real rarity these days) as well as at least one that's wheelchair accessible. Each ship also has an elevator, giving wheelchair-using passengers access to the entire ship.

PUBLIC AREAS Three public lounges and plenty of open deck space give passengers a good amount of elbowroom. The main lounge is located forward, directly underneath the bridge, and has tall windows on three sides that provide great views. As the spot for the nightly cocktail hour and the evening lecture, it is the ship's social hub and a good place for board games or chatting with shipmates during the day. The two smaller, cabin-size lounges by the central stairwell allow smaller groups the opportunity to mingle before dinner or play bridge at any time without being bothered by others. All three lounges are decorated in the same simple, muted colors and functional, unpretentious furniture, all of it attractive without being exciting. Just forward of the main lounge is a small deck with a few chairs and tables, allowing you to imbibe outdoors while watching the sunset.

The top deck of each ship is covered in an AstroTurf-like material and there are sports awnings, plastic-webbed sun lounges, and tables and chairs. On warm, sunny days, this deck is a great spot for reading and chatting, with the shoreline often within view.

DINING OPTIONS Each ship's single dining room is situated on the lowest deck all the way at the stern, with windows on three sides. Breakfast usually runs from 7:30am to 9am, preceded by early-risers' coffee and muffins set out in the main lounge at 6:30am. Lunch is timed to start shortly after the shore excursion returns, usually around 12:30pm. A 5:30pm cocktail hour precedes the 6:30pm dinner.

ADVENTURE & FITNESS OPTIONS Exercise equipment is limited to a single exercise bike and a Stairmaster. Most passengers get their exercise by going ashore independently and walking through the towns.

3 Mini-Review: American Safari Cruises

3826 18th Ave. W., Seattle, WA 98119 ✆ **888/862-8881.** Fax 206/283-9322. www.amsafari.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL American Safari Cruises offers one of the most luxurious and yet adventurous experiences in the small-ship market—and also one of the most expensive. **Sails to:** Alaska and British Columbia, Sea of Cortez/Baja, U.S./Canada coastal/river cruises.

THE EXPERIENCE Unlike the competition's mostly basic vessels, American Safari's three ships—12-passenger ***Safari Spirit*** ★★★★, 22-passenger ***Safari Quest*** ★★★★, and 36-passenger ***Safari Explorer*** ★★★★—are honest-to-God yachts bathing passengers in plush comfort, with homey lounges, hot tubs, and large cabins. Everything except gratuities is included in the pricey base price, including alcoholic beverages and shore excursions. The always-casual onboard vibe is in keeping with mostly middle-aged passengers who tend to be wealthy granola types looking to bond with nature without sacrificing luxury. Some charter an entire vessel for a family reunion. Days might be spent kayaking in the wilderness (kayaks and inflatable launches are carried on board), fishing right off the side of the yachts, and visiting small ports of call, where passengers sometimes stay overnight for a taste of the local nightlife. Expedition leaders accompany passengers on off-vessel exploration, and in Alaska, you

American Safari Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Safari Explorer	**Rivers of the West:** 7-night, between Portland, OR, and Lewiston, ID (Mar–Apr & Oct–Nov). **Washington Wine Country:** 7-night, between Portland, OR, and Lewiston, ID (Apr & Nov). **Alaska:** 14-night Inside Passage, north- & southbound between Seattle & Juneau (Apr, Sept). 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Juneau (May–Sept).
Safari Quest	**Alaska:** 14-night Inside Passage, north- & southbound between Seattle & Juneau (May, Sept). 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Juneau (May–Sept).
Safari Spirit	**Sea of Cortez/Baja:** 7-night, r/t La Paz (Jan–Mar & Nov–Dec). **Alaska:** 14-night Inside Passage, north- & southbound between Seattle & Juneau (Apr, Sept). 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Juneau (May–Aug). **Pacific Northwest & British Columbia:** 7-night, r/t Friday Harbor, WA (Sept–Oct).

might take out a Zodiac boat or kayak to investigate shoreline black bears or river otters, or to navigate fjords packed with ice floes and lolling seals. Expeditions include trips to cannery towns with boardwalks, Tlingit villages, and tiny villages.

Cabins are comfortable and have TV/DVDs. The newer *Explorer* and the *Spirit* have the largest cabins and are considered the most luxurious of the fleet. The best accommodations on the *Spirit* are the Admiral's Cabins and the Commodore Suites on the *Explorer,* all of which have large picture windows, a small sitting area, plus other features such as a cedar-lined sauna, bathrobes, slippers, iPod docking stations, or a small step-out balcony with a sliding glass door (two cabins have balconies on *Spirit* and *Explorer,* and four cabins on *Quest*). The main lounge is the social center of each ship, a place for guests to relax, listen to an informal lecture by the ship's naturalist, play a game of cards or Scrabble, or watch a movie from the ship's library on the big-screen TV. There's a hot tub on deck and a couple of fitness machines for those who want to work out. For dining, all meals are served family-style on a burnished mahogany table in a casual room on *Spirit,* and at a cluster of round tables on *Quest* and *Explorer,* usually when the ship is at anchor.

American Safari is a pricey line, with per diems generally starting in the $600 range.

4 Cruise West

2301 5th Ave., Ste. 401, Seattle, WA 98121. ✆ **888/851-8133** or 206/441-8687. Fax 206/441-4757. www.cruisewest.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL Family-owned Cruise West has been the preeminent small-ship line in Alaska for decades, but over the past decade it's also branched out to more far-flung destinations. Most of its itineraries are port to port and geared to older, well-traveled, intellectually curious passengers. They also offer a handful of more expeditionary sailings on the deep-water *Spirit of Oceanus.* **Sails to:** Alaska, Central America/Caribbean, Sea of Cortez/Baja, U.S./Canada river/coastal cruises (plus South Pacific, East Indies, Asia, Europe, Galapagos, Antarctica, world cruise).

THE EXPERIENCE Like all small ships, Cruise West's nine vessels can navigate tight waterways, visit tiny ports, and scoot up close to shore for wildlife-watching. The majority of the cruises are casual, relaxed, port-to-port trips in which passengers watch nature from the deck rather than trekking out into it. On most cruises, a quick excursion by inflatable launch is as active as it gets. At sea, the lack of organized activities

leaves you free to scan for wildlife, peruse the natural sights, talk to the other guests, or read. In port—whether one of the large, popular ports or a less visited one—the line offers a good slate of shore excursions oriented mostly to nature and history.

Cruise West also provides some more outdoors-oriented and exploratory cruises, and has lately dipped its toes into far-flung international voyages. Its flagship, the 114-passenger *Spirit of Oceanus,* is doing an 11-month world cruise in 2010, during which it will sail a couple of (separately bookable) legs on the Canadian/U.S. east coast and Central America.

Pros

- **The staff:** The line's friendly, enthusiastic staffs are a big plus, making guests feel right at home.
- **Comfort and old-fashioned style:** Two of the line's ships—the oceangoing *Spirit of Oceanus* and the old-fashioned coastal steamer *Spirit of '98*—offer snazzier surroundings than most of their small-ship competitors.

Cons

- **Limited adventure:** Most Cruise West trips are geared to older passengers, so don't book if you're looking for an active, adventurous cruise.

CRUISE WEST: ALASKA'S SMALL-SHIP LEADER & THEN SOME

Cruise West is the legacy of Chuck West, a man who arrived in Alaska after serving as a pilot in World War II, liked what he saw, and decided to share it with others. After offering the first flightseeing tours above the Arctic Circle, he went on to found Alaska's first hotel chain and first motorcoach sightseeing line. In the mid-1980s he started experimenting with cruises, and the rest is history. Chuck West died in October 2005, but his company—now the largest small-ship line in America—is run by his son Dick, and it's still growing: In 2006, Cruise West acquired two U.S.-flagged coastal ships from now-defunct Clipper Cruise Line, allowing it to expand its reach to the U.S. East Coast, the Great Lakes, and the Caribbean. And between 2007 and 2009, it expanded to the far reaches of the world, offering itineraries in Antarctica, the Galapagos, Europe, and Indonesia, as well as European river cruises. These itineraries are offered aboard chartered vessels. The line is also trying to improve its onboard program, introducing an improved onboard enrichment program, a new food-and-wine program, and a new category of cabins featuring eco-friendly amenities.

Compared with the other small-ship lines, here's how Cruise West rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor				✓	
Dining			✓		
Activities				✓	
Children's Program	N/A				
Entertainment		✓			
Service				✓	
Worth the Money				✓	

PASSENGER PROFILE

Passengers with Cruise West tend to be in the higher end of the 50-to-75+ age demographic, financially stable, well educated, and intellectually curious. Many have sailed with the mainstream lines, but came to Cruise West because they wanted a more relaxed, small-scale, dress-down atmosphere. On recent cruises, our fellow passengers have included vacationing State Department employees, several teachers, a retired bank president, a magazine art director, and a pair of behavioral psychologists. On one cruise a few years back, the passenger list included a group of 30-odd Yale alumni, including one 80-something lady from New Haven who was set on doing every active shore excursion she could—hiking, kayaking, the lot. Ditto for a 40-ish couple from Pennsylvania we met on a 2003 Alaska cruise, who were hell-bent on sampling the delicacy known as halibut cheeks.

DINING

Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served at set times at one unassigned seating. An early-riser's buffet is set out in the lounge before the set breakfast time, but if you're a late riser, you'll miss breakfast entirely, as no room service is available. At all meals, the fare is home-style American—not overly fancy, but varied enough. Chefs make a point of stocking up on fresh seafood while in port. **Vegetarian options** aren't particularly notable, but are offered at every meal, as are **heart-healthy entrees** and **staple favorites** such as steak, chicken, and fish. With advance notice, the galley can accommodate other special diets (kosher, low salt, low fat). Aboard all ships, a buffet-style lunch and/or dinner may be served on the top deck in good weather. *Spirit of Oceanus* has a buffet with outdoor seating, where breakfast and lunch are served daily.

A new dining program introduced in spring 2009 focuses on the synergy between food and wine. All Cruise West ships now highlight Pacific Northwest cuisine and pair menu items with bottles selected by line chairman Dick West. Additionally, in affiliation with the U.S. Sommelier Association, onboard servers will participate in a certificate course to ensure improved service. As an added plus, alfresco dining will be offered aboard *Spirit of Oceanus, Spirit of Yorktown, Spirit of Endeavour,* and *Spirit of '98,* weather permitting. Menu items will include fresh grilled favorites, salads, and a carving or taco bar.

SNACKS & EXTRAS A late-afternoon snack is provided every day to tide passengers over until dinner, and the chef will occasionally whip up a batch of cookies. Pretzels, nuts, and other crunchy snack foods are usually left out in the lounge/bar, where there's also a 24-hour coffee/tea/cocoa station.

ACTIVITIES

As with most small ships, Cruise West vessels don't have much in the way of onboard diversions. What activities there are may include **post-dinner discussions** of the port or region to be visited the next day, **afternoon talks** by expert guests while at sea, and perhaps a tour of the bridge or galley. Onboard fitness options are limited to walking around the open decks (except aboard *Oceanus,* which has a small gym). Along with a full slate of extra-cost excursions, one **complimentary shore excursion** is offered at each port. Sometimes they're very worthwhile—as at the Alaska Native town of Metlakatla, where passengers are treated to a wonderful performance by a Native music and dance troupe, or on the California wine country cruises, which include luncheons and tours at various wineries. Other times, though, they're just short bus trips.

Cruise West Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Pacific Explorer	**Panama/Costa Rica:** 9-night, between Panama City and San Jose (Jan–Mar & Nov–Dec). 5-night Coco Islands, r/t San Jose (Jan & Apr).
Spirit of '98	**Columbia/Snake Rivers:** 7-night, r/t Portland, OR (Apr–Oct).
Spirit of Columbia	**Alaska:** 4-night Prince William Sound, r/t Whittier (Jun–Aug).
Spirit of Discovery	**Alaska:** 4-night Glacier Bay highlights, r/t Juneau (Jun–Aug). **Columbia/Snake Rivers:** 7-night, r/t Portland, OR (Sept–Oct).
Spirit of Endeavour	**Alaska:** 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Juneau (Jun–Aug). 10-night, north- & southbound between Seattle & Juneau (May–Jun & Sept). **British Columbia/San Juan Islands:** 7-night, r/t Seattle (Apr–May & Sept). **Sea of Cortez/Baja:** 7-night, r/t Cabo San Lucas (Jan–Mar & Dec).
Spirit of Oceanus	**Atlantic Coast:** 15-night, St. John's to Halifax (Sept). 13-night, Halifax to Palm Beach (Sept). 13-night Palm Beach to Panama City (Oct).
Spirit of Yorktown	**Alaska:** 7-night Inside Passage, r/t Juneau (Jun–Aug). 10-night, north- & southbound between Seattle & Juneau (May–Jun & Sept).

Occasionally, expedition leaders will take passengers for a spin in the ships' inflatable **Zodiac boats,** getting close in to shore.

At least one and sometimes two **"expedition leader" naturalists** accompany each trip to answer passengers' questions about flora, fauna, geology, and history. As part of the line's new Compass enrichment program, experts in diverse fields will serve as **guest lecturers,** speaking on the scientific, cultural, and historic aspects of their cruise destination. In tandem with onboard naturalists, they'll also lead guests on an expanded roster of excursions by inflatable Zodiac boats (on select itineraries).

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

No children's program is available.

ENTERTAINMENT

As is standard on small-ship lines, entertainment is almost nonexistent, and what you do get will be catch-as-catch-can. One evening the crew might put on a **talent show** featuring skits, music, magic, and whatever else they can drum up. Passengers sometimes get involved. Another evening, during dinner, passengers might be given the task of creating art from whatever is on their tables, with the winning table getting a bottle of wine for the effort. Some cruises also bring **local musicians and dancers** aboard to perform. *Pacific Explorer, Spirit of Endeavour, Spirit of '98,* and *Spirit of Oceanus* have TV/VCRs in their cabins and a shelf of videos in the lounge for passengers to take at will. *Spirit of Oceanus, Spirit of '98, Spirit of Glacier Bay,* and *Spirit of Yorktown* all have pianos in their lounges for passenger use.

SERVICE

The line strives for a family feeling, employing young, energetic crews composed mostly of American college students. Crewmembers do double and triple duty, waiting tables at breakfast, making beds and cleaning cabins, polishing the handrails, and

unloading baggage at the end of the trip. They may not be consummate pros, but they do go out of their way to learn your name and offer personal service. Passengers tend to find them adorable. Crews aboard *Spirit of Oceanus* and *Pacific Explorer* are international. Laundry service is available only on *Spirit of Oceanus* and *Pacific Explorer.*

The line's new Explorer Class cabins (formerly AAA cabins)—introduced in spring 2009 aboard *Spirit of '98, Spirit of Endeavour,* and *Spirit of Yorktown*—feature **eco-friendly amenities,** including bamboo fiber linens and towels, cotton waffle-weave bathrobes, water-conserving adjustable-stream shower heads, and hypoallergenic down duvets.

Tipping is traditional, at your discretion.

Spirit of Oceanus

The Verdict

Spirit of Oceanus is one of the most luxurious small ships in the market, an ocean cruiser able to sail far-flung itineraries in style and comfort. Her cabins are downright huge.

Spirit of Oceanus *(photo: Cruise West)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	4,500	Crew	59
Passengers (double occ.)	114	Passenger/Crew Ratio	2 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio	39.5	Year Launched	1991
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	57/12	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	2001

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	5	Dining Options	5
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Adventure & Fitness Options	5
Public Comfort/Space	5	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	5	Enjoyment Factor	5

The name says it all. Unlike all the other Cruise West ships, *Spirit of Oceanus* was built for sailing in open (rather than coastal) waters, allowing the line to offer more wide-ranging itineraries. The ship was launched in 1991 as *Renaissance V,* one of the original vessels of now-defunct Renaissance Cruises. She sailed briefly for the Asian line Star Cruises before Cruise West bought and refurbished her in 2001. Today, she's the line's largest and most luxurious ship, with more public rooms, a small gym, an elevator, and a hot tub on the top deck. Her decor is more private yacht than cruise ship, with corridors and cabins done in glossy wood-look paneling studded with gleaming brasswork, and her cabins are absolutely massive. Her incredible 12- and 13-night Alaska Bering Sea/Russian Far East cruises are among the very best cruises we've ever taken, and make the average Inside Passage itinerary seem like a dinner cruise. In winter the vessel sails to the South Pacific and Japan.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Outside	$442	215–353	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS All 57 staterooms are outside cabins with picture windows or (in a few cases) large portholes, and range in size from 215 to 353 square feet, which ranks them among the largest in the small-ship world. Each has a couch, TV/VCR, minifridge, marble-topped vanity, walk-in closet or wardrobe, and comfortably sized bathroom. Decor is a far cry from the usual off-white walls and modular furnishings of most small ships. Instead, walls are paneled in dark, polished wood tones, with rich carpeting that helps to create a yachtlike look. Twelve staterooms on the Sun and Sports decks have private teak balconies, but the cabins themselves are actually smaller than those without balconies—what you gain in outside space, you lose on the inside.

Spirit of Oceanus is one of the few small ships with an elevator—a boon to folks with mobility problems—but no cabins are designed specifically for wheelchair users.

PUBLIC AREAS Public rooms include the main Oceanus Lounge—the place for frequent lectures and slide presentations by the ship's large staff of naturalists and historians—and the smaller Oceanus Club, a combo bar and reading room with a baby grand piano that gets infrequent use. Corner nooks in the club are stocked with games, a small book and video library, and the ship's one public computer (for e-mailing only).

DINING All meals are served in single open seatings in the pleasantly decorated Pacifica Restaurant. Passengers can also take breakfast and lunch at the partially covered outdoor buffet on the Sun Deck—a very pleasant perch in most weather, affording great views.

ADVENTURE & FITNESS OPTIONS There's a small gym with free weights, a step machine, an exercise bike, and two treadmills. A hot tub is outside, just behind the Bistro buffet. On Alaska/Bering Sea trips, passengers go off-vessel most days via inflatable Zodiac landing boats, with rubber boots provided by the line. (Bring rain gear, though, as trips ashore are often wet.) Destination-specific activities are also built into the trip price on South Pacific and Japan itineraries.

Spirit of '98

The Verdict

Built as a replica of a 19th-century coastal steamer, *Spirit of '98* is one of the most distinctive small ships you'll ever see.

Spirit of '98 *(photo: Cruise West)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	96*	Crew	23
Passengers (double occ.)	96	Passenger/Crew Ratio	4.2 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio	N/A*	Year Launched	1984
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	49/0	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	1995

** See note on p. 315 regarding small-ship tonnage and passenger/space measurements.*

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5) ★★★★

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	4
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Adventure & Fitness Options	2
Public Comfort/Space	4	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	5

Spirit of '98 is a time machine. Built in 1984 as a replica of a 19th-century steamship and extensively refurbished in 1995, it carries its Victorian flavor so well that some of the people we've met on board think the ship really is 100 years old. If you want to get a look at her, rent Kevin Costner's movie *Wyatt Earp;* the ending was filmed on board.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Outside	$396	81–228	some	no	some	yes
Suite	$657	550	yes	no	yes	yes

CABINS Cabins are comfortable and of decent size, continue the Victorian motif (except in their bathrooms), and feature TV/VCR combos. Deluxe cabins have a minifridge, a seating area, and a trundle bed to accommodate a third passenger. One Owner's Suite provides a spacious living room with meeting area, large bathroom with whirlpool tub, king-size bed, stocked bar with refrigerator, TV/VCR, stereo, and enough windows to take in all of Alaska at one sitting.

Cabin 309, located on the Upper Deck, is fully wheelchair accessible, and there's an elevator connecting most passenger decks, though it doesn't get up to the open Sun Deck. Two cabins are for solo passengers.

PUBLIC AREAS The Grand Salon is the ship's bar/lounge, with a suitably plinky-sounding player piano, a 24-hour tea/coffee station, and a small library of books and videos. The room continues the ship's 19th-century design theme with decorative ceiling tiles, balloon-back chairs, ruffled draperies, and plenty of polished woodwork and brass. Just aft of the dining room, a small bar called Soapy's Parlour (after legendary Skagway con man Soapy Smith) is used only at mealtimes, making it a good, quiet reading spot at other times. Out in the air, passengers congregate in the large bow area, on the open Sun Deck (where the staff sometimes sets up a bar on nice days), and at the railing in front of the bridge, which is open except when the ship is passing through rough water.

In Central America with the *Pacific Explorer*

In addition to the ships profiled here, Cruise West also operates the 100-passenger *Pacific Explorer,* launched in 1995 as the *Temptress Explorer* of Costa Rica's Temptress Adventures Cruises. Cruise West took the vessel over in 1998 and now offers 7- and 9-night Costa Rica and Panama cruises, with per diems starting around $383. *Pacific Explorer* cruises tend to be more active than most other Cruise West itineraries, with guided hikes, kayaking, and snorkeling excursions built into the rates.

DINING OPTIONS The Klondike Dining Room is beautifully decorated and large enough to seat all guests in booths and at round center tables.

ADVENTURE & FITNESS OPTIONS The Upper Deck circles the ship, giving walkers a place to exercise. Inflatable launches allow off-vessel exploration.

Spirit of Endeavour • Spirit of Glacier Bay • Spirit of Yorktown

The Verdict

Low on frills and style, but high on coziness and comfort, these ships all make a nice home base for a week of coastal cruising.

Spirit of Endeavour *(photo: Matt Hannafin)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)		Crew	
Endeavour	1,471	*Endeavour*	28
Glacier Bay	1,471	*Glacier Bay*	32
Yorktown	2,354	*Yorktown*	40
Passengers (double occ.)		Passenger/Crew Ratio	
Endeavour	102	*Endeavour*	3.6 to 1
Glacier Bay	102	*Glacier Bay*	3.2 to 1
Yorktown	138	*Yorktown*	3.5 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio		Year Launched	
Endeavour/Glacier Bay	14.7	*Endeavour*	1983
Yorktown	17	*Glacier Bay*	1984
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins		*Yorktown*	1988
Endeavour	51/0	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Glacier Bay	51/0	*Endeavour*	1999
Yorktown	69/0	*Glacier Bay/Yorktown*	2007

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5) ★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	3	Dining Options	3
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Adventure & Fitness Options	2
Public Comfort/Space	3	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	3	Enjoyment Factor	5

When discussing these ships, we keep coming back to the same impression that someone took a Holland America or Princess vessel and shrunk it to one-fiftieth its normal size. Though not boasting the many bright public rooms of those large vessels, these four-deck ships have similar clean styling, with cozy cabins and lounges.

All three of these vessels formerly sailed for now-defunct Clipper Cruise Line, under the names *Yorktown Clipper, Nantucket Clipper,* and *Newport Clipper,* respectively. *Spirit of Glacier Bay* and *Spirit of Endeavour* are nearly identical, while *Spirit of Yorktown* is a slightly larger version of the same design, with more cabins.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Outside	$523	93–204	some	some	no	some

CABINS Although generally smallish, cabins are pleasantly styled, with blond-wood writing desks, chairs, and bed frames; paintings that are better than a bare wall; and a goodly amount of closet space, plus additional storage under the beds. Beds are either permanently fixed into an L position (better for tall people) or set parallel to one another and abutted by the wall and headboard. Some cabins have twin beds that can be pushed together to make a double, and some contain upper berths to accommodate a third person. Each ship has three or four extralarge cabins measuring 163 to 204 square feet. Cabin bathrooms are compact, with toilets wedged between the shower and sink area. Bathrooms have showers but no tubs.

All cabins have picture windows, except for a handful of forward cabins on the Main Deck, which have portholes. All cabins on each ship's Promenade/Upper Deck and a handful at the stern on the Lounge Deck open onto the outdoors, rather than onto an interior corridor. No leaving the doors open for fresh air, though: They open out.

There are no cabins suitable for travelers with disabilities, and no elevators between decks.

PUBLIC AREAS Each ship has four decks and only two indoor public areas: the **dining room** and the **Observation Lounge.** The pleasant lounge has big windows, a bar, a small library, and enough space to comfortably seat everyone on board for lectures and meetings. It's the main hub of onboard activity. Lounges on *Yorktown* and *Glacier Bay* also have pianos for passenger use.

DINING OPTIONS Each ship has a single large dining room down by the waterline, with windows on both sides. This was the spot from which we sighted our first bear on our last trip, midway through our main dinner course. The captain obligingly made a U-turn, cut his engines, and let the ship drift within easy view for almost 30 minutes. Dessert was served after.

Snacks are offered in the lounge throughout the day, along with coffee, tea, and other drinks.

ADVENTURE & FITNESS OPTIONS The only onboard fitness options are walking or jogging around the deck. When anchored in calm, warm waters, you can sometimes go swimming and snorkeling right from the ship, courtesy of a small platform that's lowered into the water. Inflatable launches allow off-vessel exploration.

Spirit of Discovery • Spirit of Columbia • Spirit of Alaska

Spirit of Alaska *(photo: Cruise West)*

The Verdict

Utilitarian small ships that have been in service since the '70s, these three offer Cruise West's usual intimate cruise experience, but the word of the day is *spartan.*

Specifications

Size (in tons)		Crew	21
Discovery	94*	Passenger/Crew Ratio	
Columbia/Alaska	97*	*Discovery*	4 to 1
Passengers (double occ.)		*Columbia/Alaska*	3.7 to 1
Discovery	84	Year Launched	
Columbia/Alaska	78	*Discovery*	1976
Passenger/Space Ratio	N/A*	*Columbia*	1979
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins		*Alaska*	1980
Discovery	43/0	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	
Columbia/Alaska	39/0	*Discovery*	1992
		Columbia/Alaska	1995

* *See note on p. 315 regarding small-ship tonnage and passenger/space measurements.*

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

★★★½

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	3	Dining Options	3
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Adventure & Fitness Options	2
Public Comfort/Space	3	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	3	Enjoyment Factor	5

Though of slightly dissimilar sizes and passenger capacities, these three vessels are extremely similar, all providing the friendly Cruise West experience, though in a somewhat plainer package than their fleetmates. Though they're older ships, all have been kept in good condition. *Alaska* and *Columbia* were originally built by Captain Luther Blount for his American Canadian Caribbean Line, and therefore share a problem common to all Blount vessels: They're not good choices for very tall people, as ceilings throughout are set at little more than 6 feet 4 inches, and many beds are too short for those 6 feet 2 inches or taller. On the other hand, both have Blount's patented bow ramp, which, in combination with their shallow draft, allows the ships to basically beach themselves, debarking passengers right onto shore in places that lack docks.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$282	80	no	no	no	no
Outside	$405	95–128	some	no	some	some

CABINS Cabins aboard all three ships are very snug (smaller than those aboard their fleetmates) but comfortable, with light, B&B-ish decor and lower twin or double beds. (Aboard *Discovery,* one category has upper and lower bunks, and deluxe cabins have queen-size beds.) Storage space is ample, and most Bridge and Lounge deck cabins have picture windows. None of the cabins accommodates wheelchairs.

PUBLIC AREAS All three ships have a lounge with a bar, a 24-hour tea/coffee station, and a book and video library. Lounges are a little too small to accommodate all passengers comfortably when the ships are full.

DINING OPTIONS A single dining room serves all meals.

ADVENTURE & FITNESS OPTIONS Inflatable launches allow off-vessel exploration.

5 Lindblad Expeditions

96 Morton St., New York, NY 10014. ✆ **800/397-3348** or 212/765-7740. Fax 212/265-3770. www.expeditions.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL Lindblad Expeditions is the most adventure- and learning-oriented of the small-ship lines, offering itineraries that stay far away from the big ports, concentrating instead on wilderness and wildlife. **Sails to:** Alaska, Columbia and Snake rivers, Sea of Cortez/Baja, Central America (plus Europe, Arctic Norway, Antarctica, South America, Galapagos).

THE EXPERIENCE Want to trade in casinos and gold by the inch for 6:30am wakeup calls and shipboard forums on climate change? Then look no further than Lindblad Expeditions, which for the past few years has been operating cruises in partnership with the National Geographic Society, offering a more international, professional product than any of its small-ship competitors. The company attracts passengers who want to see, learn, and do as much as possible: You may find yourself kayaking along Alaska's intertidal zone, hiking deep into the forest in search of Arctic terns, or simply admiring the scenery while the ship's captain adjusts the itinerary to follow breaching whales. Some activities even start before breakfast. Throughout it all, flexibility and spontaneity are key, and high-caliber expedition leaders and guest scientists and photographers work hard to make the experience fresh and exciting. Significantly, they ensure that you come away having learned a lot, and just as importantly, having had lots of fun too.

Pros

- **Great expedition feeling:** Lindblad's programs offer innovative, flexible itineraries, outstanding lecturers/guides, a casual but professional atmosphere, and a friendly, accommodating staff.
- **Alliance with National Geographic:** Beyond providing top-notch lecturers and photographers aboard ship, Lindblad's relationship with the National Geographic Society means its ships are sometimes actively engaged in scientific research, with passengers right in the thick of things.
- **Built-in shore excursions:** Lindblad programs its shore excursions as an integral part of its cruises, with all excursion costs included in the cruise fare. And they'd better be, because these trips are . . .

Cons

- **Very expensive:** Lindblad's fares are among the highest in the small-ship market.

Compared with the other small-ship lines, here's how Lindblad rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor					✓
Dining			✓		
Activities					✓
Children's Program			✓*		
Entertainment			✓		
Service				✓	
Worth the Money				✓	

** The line sometimes offers family cruises in Costa Rica. Children's programs are not otherwise available.*

LINDBLAD: LEARNING CRUISES FOR THE WELL-HEELED

In 1958, adventure travel pioneer Lars-Eric Lindblad formed Lindblad Travel and began offering the first tours to remote regions of the world such as Antarctica and the Galapagos. Lars-Eric came to be considered one of the fathers of eco-tourism, and in 1979, his son Sven followed in his father's footsteps by forming Lindblad Expeditions. From the beginning, the line has specialized in providing environmentally sensitive adventure/educational cruises to remote places in the world, with visits to a few large ports thrown in for good measure. Today, they still strive to go as far off the beaten path as possible and are keen to keep their heritage and spirit of adventure alive while providing a very comfortable, well-organized experience.

In 2004, the company strengthened its already outstanding academic and enrichment program through its association with the National Geographic Society. Today, most of the Lindblad ships have been renamed to include the National Geographic moniker; the society and company work together to develop new technology for shipboard use; and National Geographic writers and photographers accompany many sailings. The two organizations have also joined forces to create a fund promoting conservation, reflecting their joint motto: "Inspiring people to explore and care about the planet."

The line's two Alaska ships, the identical, 62-passenger *National Geographic Sea Bird* and *National Geographic Sea Lion,* are more jeeps than sports cars, with small cabins and basic public areas. Though many of the amenities and services of big ship cruising—TVs, room service, minibars, and so on—are absent, Lindblad has outfitted the ships with more tools than a Swiss Army knife, including underwater video cameras, video microscopes, kayaks, inflatable Zodiac landing boats, and a hydrophone to eavesdrop on marine mammals. Particularly fun is an **underwater "bow cam"** that allows you to glimpse dolphins swimming in the bow wave or watch schools of fish below you while the ship is anchored. Despite the two ships' basic facilities, they are attractively furnished, well maintained, and have wireless Internet and a small spa/wellness program.

In addition to Alaska, these ships also offer Pacific Northwest/Columbia and Snake river cruises and voyages in Mexico's Sea of Cortez and Central America. The larger *National Geographic Endeavour* and *National Geographic Explorer* host many of the line's most exploratory sailings, occasionally making a voyage through the Caribbean en route between other regions. In the Galapagos, Lindblad operates two vessels

year-round, the 48-passenger *National Geographic Islander* and the 80-passenger *National Geographic Polaris.*

PASSENGER PROFILE

Lindblad tends to attract well-traveled, well-heeled, and well-educated professionals who are looking for an active, casual, up-close experience of their destinations, packed with wildlife, culture, and history. They're the granola crowd with money, and they're willing to pay an often substantial premium to sail. While most of them are in the 55-plus age range, a surprising number are younger, active couples. Lindblad actively encourages children and families to go on its trips, strongly believing that most kids would love to go kayaking near glaciers or snorkeling with sea lions. Single travelers are also welcome, and the line has a cabin-share program so that singles can sail without paying double for a double-occupancy room.

In general, passengers must be active and fit due to the lack of elevators, the necessity of climbing in and out of Zodiacs, and the kayaking and other activities.

DINING

Lindblad believes in serving **local and organic foods** wherever possible, and has several partnerships to source environmentally sustainable food. A fleetwide policy even prohibits the use of shrimp onboard due to the harmful by-catch when harvesting. The food may not be gourmet, but it is fresh and tasty and often reflects the culture and tastes of the region, along with such standard entrees as filet mignon, glazed shallots with red-wine sauce and giant scallops, and pasta primavera with spinach fettuccine. Dinners are served in single open seatings, and lecturers and other staff members dine with passengers, providing opportunities to, say, have a conversation about humpback whale migration over dinner. **Vegetarian options** are available at every meal, and other **special diets** (low fat, low salt, kosher, and so forth) can be accommodated with advance notice. Weather permitting, *Sea Bird* and *Sea Lion* offer **deck barbecues,** as well as **beach barbecues** in Mexico's Sea of Cortez, featuring such local dishes as grilled local seafood, handmade tortillas, tomatillo salsa, and a selection of Baja wines. Guests eat their fish tortillas by tiki torchlight, then sip their wine by a shore-side bonfire, soaking in some of that fabled "sense of place." A similar regional beach barbecue is held during stops at Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula.

SNACKS & EXTRAS Appetizers served in the late afternoon include items such as fruit and cheese platters, and baked brie with pecans and brown sugar.

ACTIVITIES

Lindblad cruises are part summer camp and part college seminar, with days typically spent off-ship aboard Zodiac boats or kayaks, and/or on land excursions. While on board, passengers entertain themselves with the usual small-ship activities: wildlife-watching, reading, and conversation. Four to five **naturalists** (the most carried by any of the small-ship lines), plus historians and undersea specialists where appropriate, present numerous **lectures and slide shows** throughout each cruise and also lead guest exploration on shore.

Many voyages also feature guest scientists, photographers, and lecturers from the **National Geographic Society.** Amateur photographers will be especially delighted with the many **photography-themed sailings,** where you can learn from and interact with some of the very best wildlife photographers in the world.

Lindblad Expeditions Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
National Geographic Sea Bird	**Alaska:** 7-night between Juneau & Sitka (May–Aug). 11-night north- & southbound between Seattle & Juneau (Apr & Sept). **Baja/Sea of Cortez:** 7-night r/t La Paz (Jan–Mar & Dec). 14-night r/t La Paz (Mar).
National Geographic Sea Lion	**Alaska:** 7-night between Juneau & Sitka (May–Aug). 11-night north- & southbound between Seattle & Juneau (Apr & Sept). **Baja/Sea of Cortez:** 7-night r/t La Paz (Jan–Mar & Dec). **Central America:** 10- & 14-night, between San Jose, Costa Rica, and Colon, Panama (Jan–Mar). 7-night, between Colon & San Jose (Jan–Mar).

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

Though Lindblad is primarily an adult line, families and younger couples make up a portion of passengers on Alaska, Central America, and Galapagos sailings. Special **family expeditions** are frequently offered in Costa Rica, as well as Greece. Staff members on these sailings have taken a family-travel course designed by Lindblad in conjunction with the National Geographic Education department.

ENTERTAINMENT

Each evening the onboard naturalists lead discussions recapping the day's events, and, after dinner, **documentary and feature films** are occasionally screened in the main lounge. Naturalists take advantage of their toys, like the video microscope that allows you to get more up close and personal with plankton than you ever imaged, or the hydrophone that's dropped over the side to let passengers listen to whales singing. In some regions, local musicians may come aboard to entertain. Books on nature and wildlife are available from each ship's small library.

SERVICE

Dining room staff and room stewards are affable and efficient, and seem to enjoy their work. As on other small ships, there's no room service unless you're ill and unable to make it to the dining room, and no laundry service.

Tipping is traditional, with $15 to $20 per day suggested.

National Geographic Sea Lion • National Geographic Sea Bird

The Verdict

Fairly utilitarian expedition vessels, *Sea Bird* and *Sea Lion* are designed to get you out into the wilderness, with naturalists aboard to teach you something about it, too.

National Geographic Sea Bird *(photo: Lindblad Expeditions)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	100*	Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.6 to 1
Passengers (double occ.)	62	Year Launched	
Passenger/Space Ratio	N/A*	*Sea Lion*	1981
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	31/0	*Sea Bird*	1982
Crew	24	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	2005

* *See note on p. 315 regarding small-ship tonnage and passenger/space measurements.*

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	3	Dining Options	3
Appearance & Upkeep	4	Adventure & Fitness Options	4
Public Comfort/Space	3	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	3	Enjoyment Factor	5

The shallow-draft *Sea Lion* and *Sea Bird* are identical twins, right down to their decor schemes and furniture. Not fancy, with just two public rooms and utilitarian cabins, they're very similar to several other small ships in this chapter, including the ACCL ships and Cruise West's *Spirit of Alaska.* As a matter of fact, *Spirit of Alaska* and the two Lindblad ships all sailed at one time for the now-defunct Exploration Cruise Lines. Make no mistake: The enrichment program and the overall experience are the main draws here, and not the ships themselves.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Outside	$667	95–110	no	no	some	no

CABINS Postage-stamp cabins are tight and functional rather than fancy. Each has twin or double beds, an adequate closet and drawers under the bed for extra storage, and a sink and mirror in the main room. Behind a folding door lies a tiny bathroom with a head-style shower (toilet opposite the shower nozzle). All cabins have picture windows that open, except for the lowest priced, which have small "portlights" that provide light but no view. Cabins can only be locked from the inside; none has an outside lock. No cabins are large enough to accommodate more than two passengers, and none are wheelchair accessible.

PUBLIC AREAS Public space is limited to an observation lounge that serves as the nerve center for activities, plus open areas on the Sun Deck and in the bow. In the lounge, you'll find a bar and a library of atlases and books on the culture, geology, history, plants, and wildlife of the sailing region. The bridge is open to passengers, and effectively becomes another public room as passengers chat with the captain or his officers at anytime day or night.

DINING OPTIONS A single dining room hosts all meals in an open seating, and within a few days, you probably will have dined and met with all the passengers and naturalists aboard. Breakfast is a buffet, lunch is often family style, and dinner is traditional, with waiter service.

ADVENTURE & FITNESS OPTIONS Each cruise involves frequent hikes in wilderness areas, accessed via Zodiac landing boats, and you'll get the opportunity to kayak whenever the weather is right. You can also walk around the Upper Deck for exercise, partake in morning stretch classes, or use the two exercise bikes and one elliptical trainer on board. A very small spa provides a wellness program and body treatments including massages.

6 The Maine Windjammers

See individual ship reviews for contact information.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL Actually, it's not a line. Unlike every other review in this book, this one discusses a collection of owner-operated vessels—classic schooners that in some cases date back as far as 1871—all taking sail-powered summer trips along the gorgeous mid-Maine coast. It's the most natural cruise you'll ever take. **Sails to:** Mid-Maine coast.

THE EXPERIENCE Let's take a poll: How many of you harried, PDA-toting, 21st-century types dream of going quietly off line for a while, back to some kind of ideal summertime memory—you in a sailboat on the open water, cozy bunks and kerosene lamps at night, stars in the sky, and quiet all around? Aboard Maine's fleet of old-time schooners, that's exactly what you get, on mostly 3- to 6-night cruises that cost from about $400 to $1,100. With no engines on most vessels, little electricity, and only the most basic accommodations, these ships remind passengers that days don't all have to be rushed and multitasked. Days are filled with sailing and walks around quaint Maine towns, and evenings are pure serenity.

Pros

- **Off-the-grid experience:** You can hardly get more "away" than on these ships, and since they rely almost exclusively on sail power (and what goes over the side is policed quite rigidly), they're an environmentally friendly way to cruise, too.
- **Relaxation in the pure sense of the word:** Passengers on these ships have no obligations and nothing to distract them from just sitting back and enjoying the ride. The experience is casual all the way, and you and the crew will bond in no time.
- **Classic ships:** Some of the association's member vessels date from as far back as 1871, and fully half the fleet's ships have been designated National Historic Landmarks.
- **Gorgeous scenery:** The Penobscot Bay region is one of the most picturesque sailing grounds anywhere, made all the more gorgeous by other schooners off in the distance. It's a perfect match of vessel and destination, picking up where New England's great 19th-century whaling ships and cargo schooners left off.

Cons

- **Rustic accommodations:** Cabins are almost universally tiny, most with only rudimentary furniture and lighting. This is actually a plus for many passengers, who come seeking just that kind of experience.
- **Few private facilities:** Only nine cabins in the whole fleet have private toilets (known as "heads" in the Windjammer world). Generally, ships have two or more shared toilets and showers.
- **Few activities:** Again, it's why a lot of people sign up, but if you need a lot of organized stimulation, look elsewhere. (On the other hand, many of the schooners have cruises themed on seamanship, photography, watercolor painting, knitting, and bird-watching.)

MAINE WINDJAMMIN': A CURE FOR THE 50-HOUR WORKWEEK

It all began in the 1930s, decades after steamships had supplanted the schooners and other sail craft that had been the mainstay of commerce and transportation for centuries. In Maine, formerly one of the top boatbuilding regions of the country, the boats that had escaped the scrap yard were in danger of simply rotting away from despair and disuse. In 1936, though, Maine artist Frank Swift began offering pleasure cruises on one of the old vessels, confident that people would be glad to escape the bustle of modern life for a few days of relaxation and simple pleasures. As Swift later recalled of his first trip, "We had only three lady passengers from Boston. The next time, I believe, we took off without any passengers." But Swift didn't give up, and soon his trips were in such demand that over the next 3 decades, he not only grew his fleet, but also lured other captains into the business. By 1977, there were so many schooners operating in coastal Maine that several decided to pool their advertising and marketing dollars and form the **Maine Windjammer Association** (✆ **800/807-WIND** [807-9463]; www.sailmainecoast.com). Today the association includes 12 member vessels, all of which are included in this review. You can request information for all member ships from the association and get basic info through their website, but bookings must be made directly with the captain of each schooner. Phone numbers and Web addresses for each are listed below. Two of the other schooners discussed here—the *Timberwind* and *J & E Riggin*—are former association members that have now teamed up as **Maine Adventure Sails** (✆ **877/300-3377;** www.maineadventuresails.com).

PASSENGER PROFILE

The Maine windjammers attract passengers in their 30s and passengers in their 90s, and everything in between. Many are returnees who sail a particular schooner every year, often coordinating with friends they've met on previous trips. Some are sailors themselves who enjoy helping out or taking a turn at the wheel. Most folks know the kind of experience they're signing on for, but first-timers often aren't quite prepared for just how rustic it can be. Bob Tassi, owner/captain of the schooner *Timberwind,* told us, "Initially, a lot of passengers experience some sense of shock, especially if they're not sailors and don't understand what a boat is. You can see it in the eyes of people who get on the boat Sunday night and they're very anxious about the accommodations, and claustrophobia, and only two toilets, but then suddenly by Wednesday they almost

Compared with the other small-ship lines, here's how schooners rate:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor					✓
Dining			✓*		
Activities			✓*		
Children's Program	N/A*				
Entertainment		✓*			
Service			✓*		
Worth the Money					✓*

** Because the Maine schooners are all owner-operated, programs vary significantly. These ratings should be taken as only a general indication of fleetwide quality. Ratings for "activities" and "entertainment" should be read in the spirit of these cruises, which are entirely outdoors oriented, with few organized activities. There's also very little of what you'd traditionally call "service." If you want a drink, you bring it aboard yourself, and there's no cabin service unless something goes drastically wrong. Meals are often prepared by the same people who trim the sails. There are no real children's programs aboard any of these ships.*

transform. Where they were checking their messages and looking at cellphones, all of a sudden that stuff gets put away, and something gets inside of them. Very few go away unhappy."

DINING

Meals on all the schooners are prepared on woodstoves in rustic galleys and served out on deck, picnic-style. In inclement weather, all passengers pack into the galley for meals. Expect traditional **New England staples** such as fresh seafood, chowder, roasts, Irish soda bread, and homemade ice cream. The cooks can accommodate **vegetarian** and some other **special diets,** but be sure to mention your needs when you book. Dinner is served soon after the ship drops anchor for the night, and chances are that other schooners will be anchored not far away. You'll hear their passengers off across the water, singing folk songs or saluting you with blasts from their tiny brass signal cannons. A few passengers or crew may even brave the frigid Maine water and swim over for a visit.

All the ships are **BYOB,** with coolers and ice provided if you've got beer to keep chilled. During the day, snacks are usually available in the galley. Once per cruise, most of the ships debark passengers onto a quiet, rocky beach for a traditional **lobster bake,** sometimes with champagne.

ACTIVITIES

An exact opposite of the typical cruise experience, the Maine schooners sail during the day and anchor in protected coves every night. In the evenings or mornings, they'll often run a small boat to shore and allow passengers to explore small **fishing towns** and **uninhabited islands.** You can also see the sights at your port of embarkation because all the schooners encourage guests to arrive a day before sailing and spend the night on board, at the dock.

Most guests participate in the work of sailing: hauling the sails, raising the centerboard, or hand cranking the anchor from the bay's floor (the latter not for sissies). Otherwise, days aboard are totally unstructured, leaving guests free to talk ship with the captain, take a turn at the wheel, climb the rigging for a watchman's view, or just read or stare out over the water, looking for seals, porpoises, puffins, and the occasional whale. An easy intimacy develops fast, and because the mid-Maine coast is a cruising paradise, passengers can expect to encounter any number of other schooners, sloops, and other sail craft. Often, two or more ships will take on one another in an impromptu race.

Maine Windjammer Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Entire fleet	**2- to 6-night Maine coastal cruises:** The whole fleet sails from Rockland, Rockport, and Camden, Maine, late May through mid-Oct.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

Many of the Maine windjammers have restrictions on young children sailing aboard (see individual reviews below). Others accept kids as young as 5, but there are no formal programs to keep them entertained. On one of our recent trips, a Texas couple was aboard with their 6-year-old daughter, who spent the week playing with the captain's young son. The schooner became a whole world to explore, the week an opportunity to use the imagination most kids cede to TV and video games.

ENTERTAINMENT

There is none to speak of, though many of the schooner captains and crew are musicians who may break out their instruments in the evening. Guests who play are encouraged to bring acoustic instruments.

SERVICE

Don't expect much. Crew aboard these ships are *really* crew—the folks who haul the sails and swab the decks. In their spare time they do the dishes, clean the shared restrooms, and mend what needs mending. The first mate might also be the cook (and, often, the spouse of the captain). For the most part, you're on your own.

** Photos courtesy of the Maine Windjammer Association and Maine Adventure Sails.*

American Eagle

Launched in 1930, *American Eagle* was a fishing schooner for 53 years before being refurbished for passenger sailing. She's a gorgeous, immaculately maintained vessel, with a sleek profile and gleaming, polished woodwork. Named a National Historic Landmark in 1991, she's the only schooner in the area certified to sail internationally, enabling her to make an annual cruise to Canada. The ship also takes an annual cruise south to Gloucester, Massachusetts, her old home port from her fishing days.

Ambience: Quiet. There's often a cribbage game in the galley, and in the evening Captain John Foss reads Maine stories and poems appropriate to the day's sights. Guests spend an hour a day on shore, minimum. **Cabins:** Cabins have hot and cold running water, reading lights, and some heat in the spring and fall. **Bathrooms/Showers:** Two shared heads below deck, each with a wash sink. One shower in the midships compartment. **Size:** 92 ft. **Passengers:** 26 (min. age 12). **Contact:** Captain John Foss, P.O. Box 482, Rockland, ME 04841. ✆ **207/594-8007;** www.schooneramericaneagle.com.

Angelique

Launched in 1980 for passenger sailing, she's the only nonschooner in the fleet, rigged instead as a gaff topsail ketch with dark-red sails that really make her stand out.

Ambience: Quiet, with no organized activities. There's music if someone brings aboard an instrument and isn't shy. (There's also a piano in the deckhouse salon.) Guests can go ashore both morning and evening if time allows. **Cabins:** Cabins have upper and lower bunks or double beds. All have running water and reading lights. **Bathrooms/Showers:** Three shared heads below deck, and three showers. **Size:** 95 ft. **Passengers:** 29 (min. age 12). **Contact:** Yankee Packet Company, P.O. Box 736, Camden, ME 04843. ✆ **800/282-9989;** www.sailangelique.com.

Grace Bailey

Launched in 1882, *Grace Bailey* came to Maine for cargo work in 1910. Designated a National Historic Landmark in 1990, she's won and placed multiple times in the Windjammer Association's annual Great Schooner Race.

Ambience: Quiet, with no predetermined activities. There's music if any musicians are aboard (there's a piano in the after-cabin lounge). Guests can often go ashore in the mornings, with hiking time also allowed during the lobster bake on longer sailings. **Cabins:** Rustic cabins with upper and lower bunks, a water basin, and battery-powered lights. **Bathrooms/Showers:** Three shared heads below deck. One hot/cold freshwater shower. **Size:** 80 ft. **Passengers:** 29 (min. age 16, but younger teens can be accommodated with supervision). **Contact:** Maine Windjammer Cruises, P.O. Box 617, Camden, ME 04843. ✆ **800/736-7981;** www.mainewindjammercruises.com.

Heritage

Built by her captains on a 19th-century model, *Heritage* was launched in 1983 for the windjammer trade and is an exceptionally spiffy vessel, with clean lines and a lovely profile.

Ambience: Flexible to whatever the group on board is interested in: singing, storytelling, games, and/or quiet. Guests are able to go ashore several times a week, as time permits. **Cabins:** Cabins have hot and cold running water and 12-volt cellphone charging outlets. Two cabins have private heads—talk about luxury! **Bathrooms/Showers:** Three shared heads. One hot/cold freshwater shower. **Size:** 95 ft. **Passengers:** 30 (min. age 12, but returning guests may bring younger children). **Contact:** Schooner Heritage, P.O. Box 482, Rockland, ME 04841. ✆ **800/648-4544;** www.schoonerheritage.com.

Isaac H. Evans

Launched in 1886, the *Evans* spent 85 years working Delaware Bay as an oyster schooner before switching to passenger sailing in Maine. Designated a National Historic Landmark, she's currently the only Maine schooner exclusively owned and operated by a woman.

Ambience: Varies, with games, music, and activities programmed if passengers want them. Guests are able to go ashore at least once per day, sometimes twice. Some sailings are themed on photography, hiking, knitting, and so on. **Cabins:** Cabins have hot and cold running water, electric reading lights, windows for light and ventilation, and more than the average number of extras (soap, lotion, shampoo, and so on). Six cabins have double beds; the rest have upper and lower berths. **Bathrooms/Showers:** Two shared heads. One enclosed shower whose water is heated by the galley's wood stove. **Size:** 65 ft. **Passengers:** 22 (min. age 6, though younger children are sometimes okay). **Contact:** Captain Brenda Walker, P.O. Box 791, Rockland, ME 04841. ✆ **877/238-1325;** www.isaacevans.com.

J & E Riggin

Launched in 1927, *Riggin* worked as an oyster dredger before being rebuilt for passenger sailing in 1977. Known for her speed, she won the first and only oyster schooner race ever held on the Delaware Bay, and has won the Great Schooner Race several times. She was named a National Historic Landmark in 1991.

Ambience: Days are quiet, while nights usually have music, games, and storytelling. Guests can usually go ashore in the mornings for an hour or two. Co-captain Anne Mahle is known for her cooking, and has published a cookbook of the dishes served on board. **Cabins:** All cabins have quilts, reading lights, a porthole, and a sink with cold running water and handmade soap. **Bathrooms/Showers:** Two shared heads and

one hot/cold shower, all on deck. **Size:** 89 ft. **Passengers:** 24 (min. age 12, but summer family cruises take kids as young as 6). **Contact:** Captain Jon Finger and Anne Mahle, 136 Holmes St., Rockland, ME 04841. ✆ **800/869-0604;** www.riggin.com.

Lewis R. French

Built in Maine in 1871, the *French* is the oldest schooner in the fleet (along with *Stephen Taber*) and the only Maine-built 19th-century schooner still in existence. She operated as a cargo schooner until 1971, after which she was converted for passengers and named to the National Register.

Ambience: There are no planned events, leaving guests to provide their own atmosphere. Guests can go ashore almost every day for 1 or 2 hours. Smoking is not allowed on board, nor are cellphones, TVs, or loud radios. **Cabins:** Cabins have cold running water and a window for ventilation. **Bathrooms/Showers:** Two shared heads and one hot/cold freshwater shower, all on deck. **Size:** 64 ft. **Passengers:** 22 (min. age 16). **Contact:** Captain Garth Wells, P.O. Box 992, Camden, ME 04843. ✆ **800/469-4635;** www.schoonerfrench.com.

Mary Day

Launched in 1962, *Mary Day* was the first schooner built specifically as a windjammer and the first coastal schooner built in Maine since 1930.

Ambience: Games and music are encouraged aboard *Mary Day,* with Captain Barry King often playing guitar. Guests are able to go ashore every day for an hour or more, and the weekly lobster bake allows for 3 hours ashore on a remote beach. **Cabins:** Cabins have cold running water, reading lights, skylights and windows, and unusually high headroom (9 ft. in most). **Bathrooms/Showers:** Two heads and two hot/cold showers, all on deck. **Size:** 90 ft. **Passengers:** 30 (min. age 15). **Contact:** Schooner Mary Day, P.O. Box 798, Camden, ME 04843. ✆ **800/992-2218;** www.schoonermaryday.com.

Mercantile

Launched in 1916, *Mercantile* hauled cargo before windjammer pioneer Frank Swift converted her for passengers in 1942. She was named a National Historic Landmark in 1990.

Ambience: Onboard experience is tailored to the passengers aboard, with music and games offered if anyone's interested. When possible, guests can go ashore in the mornings, and on longer sailings, extra hiking time is available during the lobster bake. **Cabins:** Rustic cabins with bunks, a water basin, and battery-powered lights. **Bathrooms/Showers:** Two heads below deck and a third in the galley/dining area. One hot/cold freshwater shower. **Size:** 78 ft. **Passengers:** 29 (min. age 16, but younger teens can be accommodated). **Contact:** Maine Windjammer Cruises, P.O. Box 617, Camden, ME 04843. ✆ **800/736-7981;** www.mainewindjammercruises.com.

Mistress

The smallest ship in the windjammer fleet, *Mistress* was launched in 1960 as a blend of traditional schooner and private yacht. A local blacksmith did all her ironwork, and much of her hardware was secured from an old-time ship's chandlery in Nova Scotia.

Ambience: Onboard experience is tailored to the passengers, with music, games, and time ashore based on interest. Lobster bakes are included on 4- and 5-day cruises, with time for hiking. **Cabins:** Each of her three private cabins has its own head, sink, and private companionway from the deck. Two have double beds; the third has upper and lower bunks. **Bathrooms/Showers:** Three private heads. One sun shower for impromptu wash-ups during warm weather, plus stops at friendly B&Bs and inns, where passengers may use the showers. **Size:** 46 ft. **Passengers:** 6 (min. age 16 unless booking whole boat). **Contact:** Maine Windjammer Cruises, P.O. Box 617, Camden, ME 04843. ✆ **800/736-7981;** www.mainewindjammercruises.com.

Nathaniel Bowditch

Built in East Boothbay, Maine, and launched in 1922 as a private racing yacht, *Bowditch* won class honors in the Bermuda Cup in the 1920s and during World War II was used by the Coast Guard for submarine surveillance. She fished the North Atlantic in the postwar years and was rebuilt for the passenger trade in the early 1970s.

Ambience: Music is encouraged, and games and puzzles are kept in the galley for passenger use. Guests are able to go ashore most days. Quiet time is encouraged after 8pm. **Cabins:** Rustic cabins with either double or single beds, barrel water, and reading lights. Some cabins have skylights. **Bathrooms/Showers:** Three shared heads below deck. One hot/cold shower on deck, with a privacy curtain set up while the ship is at anchor. **Size:** 82 ft. **Passengers:** 24 (min. age 14, but designated family sailings accept kids as young as 5). **Contact:** Captain Owen and Cathie Dorr, 4 Gay Street Place, Rockland, ME 04841. ✆ **800/288-4098;** www.windjammervacation.com.

Stephen Taber

Like the *Lewis R. French, Stephen Taber* was built way back in 1871, and is the oldest sailing vessel in continuous service in the U.S. She hauled lumber, stone, and produce up and down the Eastern seaboard for a full century, and is now listed on the National Register.

Ambience: The *Taber* is known as a fun vessel, and a day's sail often ends with music and stories. Guests are able to go ashore once or twice daily, weather permitting. Operated by the same family for over a quarter century, the *Taber* is known for her food (former captain Ellen Barnes, mother of the current captain, has published many family recipes in the cookbook *A Taste of the Taber*) and draws a huge number of repeat passengers—upward of 70% on most sailings. **Cabins:** Cabins have running water, lights, windows, and enough headroom to stand and dress. **Bathrooms/Showers:** Two shared heads and one hot-water shower, all on deck. **Size:** 68 ft. **Passengers:** 22 (min. age 14). **Contact:** Captain Noah Barnes and Jane Barnes, Windjammer Wharf, P.O. Box 1050, Rockland, ME 04841. ✆ **800/999-7352;** www.mainewindjammers.com.

Timberwind

Built in Portland, Maine, in 1931, *Timberwind* spent the first 38 years of her life stationed 18 miles off Portland Head, taking pilots to meet large ships and navigate them in. She was converted for passenger sailing in 1969, designated a National Historic Landmark in 1992, and today is one of the most rustic vessels in the fleet, affording a real back-in-time experience.

Ambience: Quiet, with days spent sailing and guests able to go ashore most days for 1 to 3 hours. Music lovers might be particularly interested in this vessel because her owner, Captain Bob Tassi, was a Nashville studio engineer before chucking it all to become a schooner man. Evenings frequently find him on guitar, and a framed portrait of Frank Sinatra adds an incongruous grace note to the rustic galley. **Cabins:** Tiny varnished-wood cabins have small electric lights, barrel water, and an enamel wash basin. Beds are either bunks or doubles. **Bathrooms/Showers:** Two shared heads below deck. One on-deck shower with privacy curtain. **Length:** 70 ft. **Passengers:** 20 (min. age 5). **Contact:** Schooner Timberwind, P.O. Box 247, Rockport, ME 04856. ✆ **800/759-9250;** www.schoonertimberwind.com.

Victory Chimes

Launched in 1900, *Victory Chimes* is the largest U.S.-flagged commercial sailing vessel and the only classic three-masted schooner still operating. Because of her size, her onboard feel is less cozy than the other vessels in the fleet—more ship than sailboat. Her image adorns the back of the Maine State Quarter, minted in 2003.

Ambience: There are no scheduled activities, though music and games often break out. Guests can go ashore in the morning and evening every day for 1 to 2 hours. **Cabins:** Cabins have bunk beds, portholes, 110-volt outlets, reading lights, and sinks with hot and cold running water. Most have upper and lower berths. There are also three single cabins, one cabin with twin beds, one that sleeps four, and four cabins with double beds and private toilets. **Bathrooms/Showers:** Three shared heads (two on deck, one below). Two showers. **Size:** 132 ft. **Passengers:** 40 (min. age 10). **Contact:** Victory Chimes, P.O. Box 1401, Rockland, ME 07841. ✆ **800/745-5651;** www.victorychimes.com.

7 Mini-Review: Sea Cloud Cruises

32–40 N. Dean St., Englewood, NJ 07631. ✆ **888/732-2568** or 201/227-9404. Fax 201/227-9424. www.seacloud.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL Germany-based Sea Cloud Cruises caters to a well-traveled clientele looking for a deliciously exotic, five-star sailing adventure, and an international one too: Typical Caribbean cruises draw about 30% American passengers, 30% German, 20% British, and the rest from elsewhere in Europe. A trip aboard one of the line's sailing ships—the 2,532-ton, 64-passenger ***Sea Cloud*** ★★★★★ or the 3,849-ton, 94-passenger replica ***Sea Cloud II*** ★★★★★—will spoil small-ship lovers forever. **Sails to:** Caribbean (plus Europe).

THE EXPERIENCE In 1931, Wall Street tycoon **E. F. Hutton** commissioned construction of the four-masted sailing ship *Hussar* from the Krupp family shipyard in Kiel, Germany. Outfitting of her interior was left to Hutton's wife, heiress and businesswoman **Marjorie Merriweather Post,** who spent 2 years on the task, eventually drafting a full-scale diagram showing every detail of her design, down to the placement of antiques. After the couple's divorce, Post renamed the vessel *Sea Cloud* and sailed her to Leningrad, where second husband Joseph E. Davies was serving as U.S. ambassador. World War II saw the vessel commissioned to the U.S. Navy, which removed her masts and used her as a floating weather station. After the war, the vessel passed through numerous hands: first back to Post, then to Dominican dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Montinas, then to a number of American owners before she was purchased by German economist and seaman Hartmut Paschberg. A lover of great ships, Paschberg and a group of Hamburg investors put up the money for an 8-month overhaul that restored *Sea Cloud*'s original grandeur, full of marble, gold, and mahogany detailing. Today the line is owned by the Hansa Treuhand Group based in Hamburg, Germany. The ship has cabins for 64 passengers, the luckiest (and richest) of whom can stay in Post's own museum-like suite, with its Louis XIV–style bed and nightstands, marble fireplace and bathroom, chandeliers, and intricate moldings. The other original suites are similarly if less sumptuously furnished. Standard cabins are comfortable, but lack the suites' time-machine quality. Still, everyone aboard gets to enjoy **a taste of the past** in the main restaurant, with its dark-wood paneling, brass trimmings, and nautical paintings.

The larger, three-masted *Sea Cloud II* is a modern reinterpretation of the classics, built in 2001. Her elegant lounge has rich mahogany woodwork, ornate ceiling moldings, leather club couches, and overstuffed bucket chairs, and she has several opulent suites, one with burled wood paneling and a canopy bed. On both ships, standard cabins are very comfortable and designed with true yachting elegance. Those on *II* have small sitting areas, and all cabins have TV/VCRs, phones, safes, hair dryers, bathrobes, and bathrooms with showers and marble sinks.

The dining room on each ship accommodates all guests in a single, open seating, and fine wines and beer are complimentary at lunch and dinner. Breakfast and some lunches are provided **buffet-style,** while the more **formal dinners** are served on elegant candlelit tables set with white linens, china, and silver. Most men wear jackets nightly, though the 2 formal nights on each cruise are not black-tie affairs—jackets and ties work just fine. Most cruises also feature a **barbecue night** out on deck.

Sea Cloud Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Sea Cloud	**Caribbean:** 7-, 10- & 11-night eastern & southern, r/t Barbados, r/t St. John, or between St. John & Barbados (Jan–Mar).
Sea Cloud II	**Caribbean:** 7- & 14-night eastern/southern, r/t Barbados; between Curaçao and Puerto Limon, Costa Rica; Havana, Cuba, and Santo Domingo; etc. (Jan–Apr).

These being small sailing ships, organized activities are few; it's the ships themselves that entertain, and watching the crew work the riggings, plus visits to less touristed ports such as Les Saintes, Dominica, Bequia, Tobago, and St. Barts. Usually only 1 day of each cruise is spent at sea. Outside decks of both ships are covered with lines, winches, cleats, brass compasses, wooden deck chairs, and other ship accouterments, providing a wonderfully nostalgic and nautical setting. **Sailing lectures** are given on every cruise, though passengers are not allowed to handle the sails. *Cloud II* also has a library, a small gym, a sauna, and a swimming platform. Evenings may consist of **piano music** and mingling over cocktails. Other activities may include talks by resident **guest lecturers;** local **musicians** who come aboard for a few hours; and **"open houses,"** during which guests enjoy champagne and caviar on the Main Deck before touring each other's cabins (with the residents' permission, of course).

Pricing for weeklong Caribbean cruises tends to start in the $4,200-plus range. Sea Cloud sometimes charters its ships to other entities, notably Lindblad Expeditions, which has used *Sea Cloud II* in both the Caribbean and Europe recently.

8 Star Clippers

7200 NW 19th St., #206; Miami, FL 33126. ✆ **800/442-0551** or 305/442-0550. Fax 305/442-1611. www.starclippers.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL It's easy to fall in love with the Star Clippers experience—it's simply intoxicating. With the sails and rigging of a classic clipper ship and some of the cushy amenities of modern megas, a cruise on these beauties spells adventure and comfort. **Sails to:** Caribbean (plus Asia, South Pacific, Europe).

THE EXPERIENCE The more ships we've sailed on, the more Star Clippers stock goes up. Few other lines offer the best of two worlds in such an appealing package. On the one hand, the ships offer comfortable, almost cushy public rooms and cabins. On the other, they espouse an unstructured, let-your-hair-down, hands-on ethic—you can climb the masts (with a harness, of course), help raise the sails, crawl into the bow netting, or chat with the captain on the open-air bridge.

On board, ducking under booms, stepping over coils of rope, leaning against railings just feet above the sea, and watching sailors work the winches are constant reminders that you're on a real working ship. Furthermore, listening to the captain's or cruise director's daily talk about the next port of call, the history of sailing, or some other nautical subject, you'll feel like you're exploring some of the Caribbean's more remote stretches in a ship that really belongs there—an exotic ship for an exotic locale. In a sea of look-alike megaships, *Royal Clipper* stands out, recalling a romantic, swashbuckling era of ship travel.

Pros

- **Hands-on experience:** You never have to lift a finger if you don't want to, but if you do, you're free to help out.
- **Comfortable amenities:** Pools, a piano bar and deck bar, a bright and pleasant dining room serving tasty food, and a clubby, wood-paneled library balance out the swashbuckling spirit. *Bonus:* There's also a gym, a small spa, and marble bathrooms.
- **Rich in atmosphere:** On this ship, the ambience is a real treat.
- **Offbeat itineraries:** Itineraries take passengers to remote places such as the Grenadines and French West Indies.

Cons

- **We're still trying to think of something . . . .**

STAR CLIPPERS: COMFY ADVENTURE

Clipper ships—full sailed, built for speed, and undeniably romantic—reigned for only a brief time on the high seas before being driven out by steam engines and iron (and then steel) hulls. During their heyday, however, these vessels, including famous names such as *Cutty Sark, Ariel,* and *Flying Cloud,* engendered more romantic myths than any before or since, and helped open the Pacific coast of California during the gold rush of 1849, carrying much-needed supplies around the tip of South America from Boston and New York.

By the early 1990s, despite the nostalgia and sense of reverence that had surrounded every aspect of the clippers' maritime history, nothing that could be technically classified as a clipper ship had been built since *Cutty Sark* in 1869. Enter Mikael Krafft, a Swedish-born industrialist and real estate developer with a passion for ship design and deep, deep pockets, who invested vast amounts of personal energy and more than $80 million to build *Star Flyer* and *Star Clipper* at a Belgian shipyard in 1991 and 1992.

To construct these 170-passenger twins, Krafft procured the original drawings and specifications of Scottish-born Donald McKay, a leading naval architect of 19th-century clipper-ship technology, and employed his own team of naval architects to solve such engineering problems as adapting the square-rigged, four-masted clipper design to modern materials and construction. In mid-2000, Krafft went a step farther,

Compared with the other small-ship lines, here's how Star Clippers rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor					✓
Dining				✓	
Activities				✓	
Children's Program	N/A				
Entertainment			✓		
Service				✓	
Worth the Money					✓

launching the 227-passenger *Royal Clipper,* a five-masted, fully rigged sailing ship inspired by the famed *Preussen,* a German clipper built in 1902. *Royal Clipper* now claims the title of the largest clipper ship in the world, and she's a stunning sight.

Overall, the experience is quite casual, and salty enough to make you feel like a fisherman keeling off the coast of Maine, without the physical hardship of actually being one. As Krafft put it on one sailing, "If you want a typical cruise, you're in the wrong place."

All the Star Clippers vessels are at once traditional and radical. They're the tallest and among the fastest clipper ships ever built, and are so beautiful that even at full stop they seem to soar. As opposed to ships such as Windstar's *Wind Surf,* a bulkier cruise vessel that just happens to have sails, Star Clippers' ships do generally rely on sails alone about 25% to 50% of the time; the rest of the time, the sails are used with the engines. Each ship performs superlatively—*Royal Clipper* was designed to make up to 20 knots under sail (14 max under engine alone), and on a recent cruise, she easily hit 15 knots one afternoon. During most cruises, however, the crew tries to keep passengers comfortable and decks relatively horizontal, so the vessels are kept to speeds of 9 to 14 knots with a combination of sail and engine power.

For 2009 and 2010, *Star Clipper* and *Star Flyer* are scheduled to stay in the Far East, South Pacific, and Mediterranean year-round, and so are not reviewed in this edition.

In 2008 Star Clippers announced their intention to build a new five-masted ship. Planned as the most expensive sailing ship ever built, the 7,400-gross-ton, 296-passenger barque is being modeled on *France II,* the largest sailing ship when it was launched in 1912 at 5,633 gross tons. The plan is for the ship to have 37 sails, measure 518 feet long, and have an Ice Class C hull so it can sail anywhere in the world. Though 48% larger than the *Royal Clipper,* it will only carry 30% more passengers. We hope it happens!

PASSENGER PROFILE

With no more than 227 passengers aboard, each Star Clippers cruise seems like a triumph of individuality and intimacy. The line's unusual niche appeals to passengers who might recoil at the lethargy and/or sometimes forced enthusiasm of cruises aboard larger, more typical vessels. Overall, the company reports that a whopping 60% of passengers on average are repeaters back for another Star Clippers cruise.

While you're likely to find a handful of 30-something honeymoon-type couples and an extended-family group or two, the majority of passengers are well-traveled couples in their 50s to 60s, all active and intellectually curious professionals (such as executives, lawyers, and doctors) who appreciate a casual yet sophisticated ambience and enjoy mixing with fellow passengers. During the day, polo shirts, shorts, and topsiders are standard issue; and for dinner, many passengers simply change into cleaner and better-pressed versions of the same, with perhaps a switch from shorts to slacks for most men. However, men in jackets and women in stylish dresses aren't uncommon on the night of the captain's cocktail party.

With a nearly even mix of North Americans and Europeans (most often from Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, and the U.K.) on a typical Caribbean cruise, the international onboard flavor is as intriguing as the ship itself. Announcements are made in English, German, and French.

DINING

Star Clippers' cuisine has evolved and improved over the years as the line has poured more time and effort into it, with an enhanced menu that includes four well-presented entree choices at each evening meal. All meals are open seating, with tables for four, six, and eight in the restaurant; the dress code is always casual (though some guests don jackets on the night of the captain's cocktail party). Breakfast and lunch are served buffet-style and are the best meals of the day. The continental cuisine reflects the line's large European clientele and is dominated at breakfast and lunch by cheeses (such as brie, French goat cheese, and smoked Gouda), as well as marinated fish and meats. Breakfasts also include a hot-and-cold buffet spread and an omelet station, where a staff member will make your eggs the way you like them. Late-afternoon snacks served at the Tropical Bar include such munchies as crudités, cheeses, and chicken wings.

Dinners consist of appetizers, soup, salad, dessert, and a choice of five entrees: seafood (such as lobster and shrimp with rice pilaf), meat (beef curry, for example), vegetarian, a chef's special, and a light dish. Dinner choices such as fusilli in a tomato sauce, grilled Norwegian salmon, and herb-crusted rack of lamb are tasty, but tend toward the bland side. Most dinners are sit down (as opposed to the occasional buffet spread up on deck), and service can feel a bit rushed and frenetic during the dinner rush. Breakfast and lunch don't get as crowded because passengers tend to eat at staggered times. Waiters and bartenders are efficient and friendly, and, depending on the cruise director, often dress in costume for several theme nights each week.

A worthwhile selection of wines is available on board, with a heavy emphasis on medium-priced French, German, and California selections.

SNACKS & EXTRAS Coffee and tea are available from a 24-hour coffee station in the piano bar. At happy hour each day are complimentary canapés to go along with the daily drink special. About 11:30pm each night, a cheese board, fruit, or another snack is set out by the piano bar for late-night noshing. Passengers staying in the 14 suites and Owner's Suites get 24-hour room service.

ACTIVITIES

If you want action, shopping, and dozens of organized tours, you won't find much of what you're looking for on these ships and itineraries—in fact, their absence is a big part of the line's allure. For the most part, enjoying the experience of being on a sailing ship and socializing with fellow passengers and crewmembers is the main activity, as it is on most any ship this size. Plus, the ships are generally in port every single day, so boredom is not an issue.

The friendliness starts at the get-go, with smiling waitstaff offering guests complimentary fruit drinks as they board. Throughout the cruise, the captain gives at least one **informal talk** on maritime themes, and, at least once a day, the cruise director speaks about the upcoming ports and shipboard events. Within reason, passengers can lend a hand with deck duties, observe the mechanics of navigation, **climb the masts** (at designated times and with a safety harness), and have a token try at handling the wheel when circumstances and calm weather permit. Each ship maintains an **open-bridge policy,** allowing passengers to wander up to the humble-looking navigation center at any hour of the day or night (you may have to ask to actually go into the chart room, though).

Star Clippers Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Royal Clipper	**Caribbean:** 7-night eastern & southern, r/t Barbados (Jan–Apr & Nov–Dec).

Other activities may include a brief engine-room tour, morning exercise classes on deck, excursions via tender to photograph the ship under sail, in-cabin movies, and hanging out by one of the three pools. Of course, sunbathing is a sport in itself. Best spot for it? In the bowsprit netting, hanging out over the water. It's sunny, it's a thrill in itself, and it's the perfect place from which to spot dolphins in the sea just feet below you, dancing in the bow's wake. Massages are available, too, at a reasonable $75 an hour: There are several small massage rooms and also a small gym.

Port activities are a big part of these cruises. Sailing from one island to another and often arriving at the day's port of call sometime after 9am (but usually before 11am, and usually after a brisk early-morning sail), the ship either docks alongside the shore right in town or anchors offshore and shuttles passengers back and forth by tender. On many landings, you'll have to walk a few feet in shallow water between the tender and the beach.

Activities in port revolve around beaches and watersports, and all are complimentary. That's partly because owner Mikael Krafft is an avid scuba diver and partly because itineraries focus on waters that teem with marine life; each ship offers (for an extra charge) the option of PADI-approved **scuba diving.** Certified divers will find all the equipment they'll need on board. Even noncertified/inexperienced divers can pay a fee for scuba lessons that will grant them resort certification and allow them to make a number of relatively simple dives (on every sailing there's a certified diver on the watersports staff). There's also snorkeling (complimentary equipment is distributed at the start of the cruise), water-skiing, windsurfing, sailing, and banana-boat rides offered by the ship's watersports team in all ports. The ship carries along Zodiac motorboats for this purpose, and *Royal Clipper* has a retractable marina at its stern for easy access to the water. Because there are few passengers on board and everything is so laid-back, no sign-up sheets are needed for these activities; guests merely hang out by the gangway or on the beach until it's their turn.

The ship tends to depart from its ports early so that it can be under full sail during sunset. Trust us on this one: Position yourself at the ship's rail or dawdle over a drink at the deck bar to watch the sun melt into the horizon behind the silhouetted ships' masts and ropes. It's something you won't forget.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

An experience aboard a sailing ship can be a wonderfully educational and adventurous experience, especially for self-reliant children who are at least 10 years old. That said, this is not generally a line for young kids (though the line has no age restrictions, there are no supervised activities and no babysitting unless a well-intentioned crewmember agrees to volunteer his or her off-duty hours). The exception is during holiday seasons such as Christmas, when families are accommodated and some children's activities are organized by the watersports staff, including treasure hunts, beach games, and arts and crafts.

ENTERTAINMENT

Some sort of featured entertainment takes place each night after dinner by the Tropical Bar, which is the main hub of activity. There's a crew talent show one night that's always a big hit with passengers; other nights may offer a trivia contest, dance games, or a performance by local entertainers (such as a steel-drum band) who come on board for the evening. A keyboard player is on hand to sing pop songs before and after dinner, but the twangy renditions of tunes such as "Chattanooga Choo Choo" and "Day-O" don't really fit in with the ships' otherwise rustic ambience. Most nights, disco music is put on the sound system and a section of the deck serves as an impromptu dance floor, with the action usually quieting down by about midnight (if not earlier). Sometimes films are shown up on deck against a sail.

You can borrow DVDs from the library or watch the movies that are shown each day on cabin TVs in English, German, and French if you feel like vegging. Besides that, it's just you, the sea, and conversation with your fellow passengers.

SERVICE

Service is congenial, low key, unpretentious, cheerful, and reasonably attentive. During busy times, expect efficient but sometimes distracted service in the dining rooms; and during your time on deck, realize that you'll have to fetch your own bar drinks and whatever else you may need. *Royal Clipper* has a second bar on the Top Deck adjacent to the pools, so you're never more than a 30-second walk from a cool drink.

The crew is international, hailing from Poland, Belgium, Ukraine, Russia, Germany, Romania, Indonesia, India, the Philippines, and elsewhere, and their presence creates a wonderful international flavor on board. Crewmembers are friendly and usually good-natured about passengers who want to help with the sails, tie knots, and keep the deck shipshape.

Officers, the cruise director, and the watersports team may dine with passengers during the week, and if you'd like to have dinner with the captain, just go up to the bridge one day and ask; he may oblige you (it depends on the captain). Unlike a lot of other small-ship lines, Star Clippers has a nurse aboard all sailings (though don't be surprised when you see her busing tables in the restaurant or doing floral arrangements, too). **Laundry service** is available and so is dry cleaning.

Tipping is traditional, at your discretion.

Royal Clipper

The Verdict

This stunning, fully rigged, five-masted, square-sail clipper is a sight to behold, and the interior amenities, from marble bathrooms to an Edwardian-style three-level dining room, are the company's most plush.

Royal Clipper *(photo: Star Clippers)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	5,000	Crew	106
Passengers (double occ.)	227	Passenger/Crew Ratio	2.2 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio	22	Year Launched	2000
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	114/14	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	2007

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	4.5
Appearance & Upkeep	5	Adventure & Fitness Options	4
Public Comfort/Space	4	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	3	Enjoyment Factor	5

Clipper's biggest and poshest ship to date—and at 439 feet in length, one of the largest sailing ships ever built—the 5,000-ton, 227-passenger *Royal Clipper* boasts more luxurious amenities than the line's older ships, including marble bathrooms, roomier cabins, a small gym and spa, and three pools. In fact, the ship definitely gives the somewhat-tired-looking, 15-plus-year-old Windstar ships a run for their money in the amenities department, while still offering a more rustic ambience. With five masts flying 42 sails that together stretch to 56,000 square feet, *Royal Clipper* is powerful too, able to achieve 20 knots under sail power only, and 14 knots under engine power. (Still, as on *Star Clipper,* the sails are more for show, and typically the engines are also in use 60%–80% of the time, especially at night.) Engines or not, for true sailors and wannabes, the web of ropes and cables stretched between *Royal Clipper*'s sails, masts, and deck—along with the winches, *Titanic*-style ventilators, brass bells, wooden barrels, and chunky anchor chains cluttering the deck—are constant and beautiful reminders that you're on a real ship. So are the creaking, rolling, and pitching.

The bottom line: This ship is a big winner for those who like the good life, but in a gloriously different way than any mainstream megaship could ever offer.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Inside	$182	113	no	yes	no	yes
Outside	$196	148	no	yes	no	yes
Suite	$638	255–320	yes	yes	no	yes

CABINS The ship's 114 cabins are gorgeous and roomy, done up in a nautical motif with navy blue and gold fabrics and dark-wood paneling. All but six are outsides with portholes and measure some 20 to 30 feet larger than cabins aboard *Star Clipper* and *Star Flyer;* they're equivalent in size to the standard cabins on many Royal Caribbean and Norwegian Cruise Line ships, though they're about 40 square feet smaller than Windstar cabins. Bathrooms are marble in all but the six inside cabins, and all have brass and chrome fittings and plenty of elbowroom, as well as brass lighting fixtures, vanity/desks, hair dryers, safes, telephones, and TVs with DVD players. One problem: There are no full-length closets in the cabins—but then again, who's bringing an evening gown?

Some 22 cabins on the Main and Clipper decks have a pull-down third berth, but unfortunately it's only about 2 feet above the beds, so even when folded up, it juts out enough so that you can't sit up in bed without bumping your head.

Six tight 113-square-foot inside cabins on the Clipper Deck (category 6) and four outside cabins in the narrow forward section of the bow on the Commodore Deck (category 5) tend to be the best cabin bargains, if you're looking to save a buck. (See chapter 2, "Booking Your Cruise & Getting the Best Price," for more information about cabin categories.)

The 14 Deluxe Suites located forward on the Main Deck are exquisite, with private balconies, sitting areas, minibars, and whirlpool tubs. The Main Deck also has two Owner's Suites measuring 355 square feet; they're connectable, so you could conceivably book them together to create a 710-square-foot suite. Each boasts a pair of double beds, a sitting area, a minibar, and—count 'em—two marble bathrooms. Neither suite has a balcony. Suite guests get 24-hour butler service.

There are no connecting cabins, nor any wheelchair-accessible cabins.

PUBLIC AREAS *Royal Clipper* is like no other small sailing ship we've ever set foot on, with a three-level atrium and frilly multilevel dining room that are more like what you'd find on a much larger ship. Like the cabins, the decor of the ship's main lounge, library, and corridors follows a strong nautical thread, with navy blue and gold upholstery and carpeting complementing dark-wood paneling.

The open-air Tropical Bar, with its long marble and wood bar, is the hub of evening entertainment and pre-dinner hors d'oeuvres and drinks, while the more elegant piano lounge just inside hosts the weekly captain's cocktail party. (The ceiling of the piano bar is the glass bottom of the main swimming pool, so shave those legs, girls!) A clubby library is adjacent to the Tropical Bar aft on the Main Deck, and far forward on this deck is an observation lounge where you'll find two computers with e-mail and Internet capability (don't expect to see many people here—everyone's out on deck).

On the lowest deck, under the waterline and adjacent to the gym, is the little Captain Nemo Lounge, where an underwater spotlight allows you to see fishy creatures swim past the portholes while at anchor (though we never saw anyone using it when we were on the ship).

DINING OPTIONS The dining room is plush in its deep-red velveteen upholstery and dark paneling, and is spread out over three levels. With its brilliant blue sea-scene murals, white moldings and fluted columns, frilly ironwork railings and staircase, and dark-red upholstery, it's vaguely reminiscent of a room on an early-20th-century ocean liner—and feels somewhat out of place on an otherwise rustic ship. The buffet table is in the center on the lowest level, with seating fanning out and up. Breakfast and lunch are buffet-style and dinner is sit down. You may notice that the low overhang from the staircase makes maneuvering around the buffet table in the dining room a bit tricky.

ADVENTURE & FITNESS OPTIONS Considering her size, *Royal Clipper* offers amazing recreation facilities, with three pools, a gym, and a small spa. The spa boils down to two small massage rooms divided by a partition, plus a room with a hot tub and a small steam room. The treatments are expertly doled out at about $75 an hour.

The ship also has a retractable watersports marina at its stern for easy access to kayaking, sailing, and swimming.

9 Windstar Cruises

2101 4th Ave., Ste. 1150, Seattle, WA 98121. ✆ **877/827-7245** or 206/292-9606. Fax 206/340-0975. www.windstarcruises.com.

THE LINE IN A NUTSHELL Windstar walks a tightrope between luxury line and sailing-ship line, with an always-casual onboard vibe, beyond-the-norm itineraries, and first-class service and cuisine.

THE EXPERIENCE You say you want a cruise that visits interesting ports; offers active options like watersports; has superfriendly yet efficient, on-the-nose service; provides excellent cuisine; has sailing trips with a romantic vibe; and still doesn't cost an arm and a leg? You pretty much only have one option: Windstar.

This is no barefoot, rigging-pulling, paper-plates-in-lap kind of cruise, but a refined yet down-to-earth, yachtlike experience for a sophisticated, well-traveled crowd of folks who wouldn't be comfortable on a big ship full of tourists. On board, stained teak, brass details, and lots of navy blue fabrics and carpeting lend a traditional nautical ambience, and though the ships' tall masts and white sails cut a traditional profile, they're also state of the art, controlled by a computer so that they can be furled or unfurled at the touch of a button. Despite the ships' relatively large size (*Wind Surf* is one of the world's largest sailing ships, if not the largest), they're able to travel at upward of 12 knots under sail power alone, though usually the sails are up more as a fuel-saving aid to the diesel engines.

Pros

- **Sails:** While you won't get a full-on sailing experience here like you do with the Maine windjammer ships or (sometimes) Star Clippers and Sea Cloud, you do get the ambience, plus the good karma of knowing the sails help save fuel.
- **Service:** Windstar employs mostly Indonesian and Filipino staff, many of whom have worked for the company for years. They're extremely professional and friendly as can be.
- **Cuisine:** Few small ships can match Windstar for the quality and ambience of its dining experience, with meals served in open-seating restaurants where guests can usually get a table for two.
- **Informal and unregimented days:** Beyond "don't wear shorts in the dining rooms," there's no real dress code here, and most men don't even bother with sport jackets at dinner. Similarly, there are zero "rah-rah" activities, keeping days loose and languid. Just explore ashore (the itineraries visit a port almost every day) or kick back and relax aboard ship without a lot of distractions.

Cons

- **Limited activities and entertainment:** This is intentional, but if you need lots of organized hoopla to keep you happy, you won't find much here.
- **No verandas:** If they're important to you, you're out of luck.

WINDSTAR: CASUAL ELEGANCE UNDER SAIL

Thank goodness there's a company like Windstar in the frequently homogenous cruise industry. It's an individual. It's got personality. Its operations are friendly and almost old-fashioned, small-scale, and full of employees who've been with the line for years. Reportedly, many repeat passengers check to make sure their favorite cabin steward, waiter, captain, or host/hostess will be aboard before they'll book a particular sailing.

Compared with the other small-ship lines, here's how Windstar rates:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Enjoyment Factor					✓
Dining				✓	
Activities		✓			
Children's Program	N/A				
Entertainment		✓			
Service					✓
Worth the Money				✓	

The line got its start in 1984, founded by a consortium of two ship owners and Jean Claude Potier, a former U.S. head of the legendary French Line. From the start, it was all about the sails—and specifically about a new cruise ship design by the Finnish shipbuilding company Wartsila. Dubbed the "Windcruiser," the concept combined 19th-century sailing-ship technology with modern engineering to create a kind of vessel never seen before in the cruise ship world: huge by sailing-ship standards, with at least 21,489 square feet of computer-controlled staysails that furl and unfurl at the touch of a button and can work on their own or in concert with a diesel-electric engine. The concept worked then, and it works now: As you see a Windstar ship approaching port, with its long, graceful hull and masts the height of 20-story buildings, you'll forget all about the giant megaships moored nearby and think, "Now that's a ship."

PASSENGER PROFILE

People who expect high-caliber service and very high-quality cuisine, but dislike the formality of most of the luxe ships (as well as the mass mentality of the megaships) are thrilled with Windstar. Most passengers are couples in their late 30s to early 60s, with the average around 50. Overall, an amazing 60% to 70% of passengers are repeaters, back for their annual or semiannual dose of Windstar. There are also usually a handful of honeymoon couples aboard any given sailing—a good choice on their part, as Windstar ranks high on our list of most romantic cruise lines. The line gets very few families with young kids—rarely more than six or seven on any sailing, and usually only during school holiday periods. Children who do sail are usually in the 10-plus age range.

Overall, Windstar's sophisticated and well-traveled passengers are more down to earth than guests on the luxury lines, but not as nature and learning focused as guests on most of the other small-ship lines. Most want something different from the regular cruise experience, eschew the "bigger is better" philosophy of conventional cruising, and want their vacation to focus more on the ports than on onboard activities. These cruises are for those who are seeking a romantic escape and like to visit ports not often touched by regular cruise ships.

Windstar caters to corporate groups, too, with about 25% of its annual cruises booked as full charters or hosting affinity groups.

DINING

Windstar's cuisine is tops in the small-ship category and is a high point of the cruise, served in two or three always-casual restaurants.

TRADITIONAL Dinner is served primarily in each ship's spacious, nautically appointed main restaurant, though the vibe here is less formal and regimented than aboard most larger ships. At dinner, the line's **no-jackets-required** policy for men means guests do the "casual elegance" thing—pants or casual dresses for women, and trousers and nice collared shirts for men—and its open-seating policy means you can show up when you want (within a 2-hr. window) and dine with whomever you want. Restaurants aboard all three ships are set up with an unusual number of tables for two, and there's rarely a wait—proof that Windstar is serious about its romantic image.

Overall, Windstar's cuisine tends toward the straightforward, but with surprising twists and regional touches. Appetizers may include golden fried brie served with cranberry sauce and crispy parsley, or a sweet shrimp and crab salad. Among the main courses, there may be a grilled local fish served with a roast-corn salsa and sweet plantains, sautéed jumbo prawns served with garlic spinach and spaghetti, or an herb-and-peppercorn-coated prime rib of beef. Desserts such as an apple tart with raspberry coulis and chocolate crème brûlée are beyond tempting. A selection of exotic fine cheeses (many bought fresh in local markets) is served tableside from a cheese cart, and petits fours are served with coffee after dinner. The restaurant's **wine list** features many boutique labels from California, Australia, New Zealand, Spain, France, and South Africa.

Vegetarian dishes and **healthy "Sail Light" choices** designed by light-cooking expert Jeanne Jones are available for breakfast, lunch, and dinner; fat and calorie content is listed on the menu. The light choices may feature Atlantic salmon with couscous and fresh vegetables, or a Thai country-style chicken with veggies and Asian rice. The vegetarian options may include a fresh garden stew or a savory polenta with Italian salsa.

ALTERNATIVE Windstar's largest ship, *Wind Surf,* offers alternative dining at the casual, 128-seat **Degrees,** an intimate space with an understated fantasy-garden motif and a menu that rotates among steakhouse, Italian, French, and Indonesian dishes. Reservations are required, but there's no additional fee.

CASUAL Breakfast and lunch are available at the buffet-style **Veranda Cafe,** which offers a generous spread, as well as a specialty omelet station at breakfast and a grill option at lunch. Waiters will bring the latter to your table, so there's no waiting. You can also opt for a simple continental breakfast at the sternside **Compass Rose Bar.**

The once-a-week evening **barbecues** on the pool decks of the *Star* and *Spirit* are wonderful parties under the stars, with an ample and beautifully designed buffet, tables set with linens, and a band adding ambience. On *Wind Surf,* there's a **gala buffet dinner** once per cruise in the main lounge, which is transformed into a third dining room for the evening, with a culinary theme matching your cruise region. All three ships also provide weekly barbecue lunches on deck.

Burgers, pizza, hot dogs, and the like are available from a grill in the afternoons.

SNACKS & EXTRAS Speedy **room service** provides continental breakfast; a menu of about a dozen sandwiches, salads, seafood, and steaks from 11am to 10pm; and a dozen more snack items (from popcorn and chips and salsa to a cheese platter or beef consommé) 24 hours a day. During restaurant hours, you can have items from the restaurant's menu served course by course in your cabin, speedy and hot.

ACTIVITIES

Because Windstar's itineraries emphasize days in port over days at sea (most cruises hit a port every day or spend just 1 day at sea per week), its ships have few organized activities, leaving days relaxed and unregimented—the way guests prefer it. The handful of

Windstar Fleet Itineraries

Ship	Itineraries
Wind Spirit	**Caribbean:** 7-night eastern, r/t St. Maarten (Jan–Mar & Dec).
Wind Star	**Costa Rica:** 7-night, r/t Puerto Caldera (Jan–Mar & Dec). **Panama Canal:** 14-night, Puerto Caldera to St. Maarten (Mar). 14-night, St. Maarten to Puerto Caldera (Dec).
Wind Surf	**Caribbean:** 7-night southern, r/t Barbados (Jan–Mar & Nov–Dec).

scheduled diversions that are available usually include casino gaming lessons, walk-a-mile and stretch classes on deck, and an occasional vegetable-carving or food-decorating demonstration. A **watersports platform** can be lowered from the stern to allow kayaking, sailing, water-skiing, snorkeling, windsurfing, and ski tubing when the ship anchors offshore. Up top, the Pool Deck has a small pool and hot tub, deck chairs, and an open-air bar. Other open areas, especially on the larger *Wind Surf,* have quiet spots for reading. There's also a scuba diving program for novices and experienced divers.

In port, the company's shore excursions tend to be more creative than usual, and the onboard hosts or hostesses (aka cruise directors, who sometimes double as shore excursions managers and jacks-of-all-trades) are usually very knowledgeable about the ports and are able to point passengers toward good spots for swimming, places of cultural or historical interest, or a nice meal. Brief orientation talks are held before port visits.

The ships all maintain an open-bridge policy, so at most times you're free to walk right in and chat with the captain and officers on duty. There's an extensive collection of DVDs and CDs that passengers can borrow for use in their cabins. Guests may also check out fully loaded **Apple iPod Nanos** free of charge from the reception desk, using them either with headphones or in conjunction with the Bose SoundDock speakers in each cabin. There are also docking stations and headphones in *Surf*'s **Yacht Club Internet cafe lounge.** All three ships provide Internet connectivity—*Wind Surf* from eight computers in the Yacht Club, *Star* and *Spirit* via two computers in their libraries. All three vessels are also rigged for **bow-to-stern Wi-Fi service,** and wireless laptops are rentable at the front desk if you don't want to lug your own.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

Because children sail infrequently with Windstar, no activities are planned for them. Kids who do sail are generally ages 10 and up, but there are rarely more than six or seven on any sailing, and those only during school breaks. The ships' DVD libraries stock some children's films. The minimum age for children to sail is 2 years.

ENTERTAINMENT

For the most part, passengers entertain themselves, though each ship does carry a number of musicians who provide tunes for evening dancing and background music. Most evenings, passengers either retire to their cabins, head for the modest **casino** with its table games and slots, or go up to the **Compass Rose Bar** (and also the indoor/outdoor **Terrace Bar** on the *Surf*) for a nightcap under the stars. Sometimes after 10 or 11pm, disco/pop music is played in the lounge if guests are in a dancing mood, and once per cruise the ship's Indonesian and Filipino crewmembers put on a **crew show** featuring traditional and contemporary music and dance. It's always a crowd pleaser.

SERVICE

Windstar is a class operation, and its level of service is no exception. The staff smiles hello and often learns passengers' names within the first hours of sailing. Dining staff is efficient and first rate as well, but not in that ultraprofessional, five-star-hotel, Seabourn-esque kind of way. That's not what Windstar is all about. As for **tipping,** Windstar automatically adds gratuities of $12 per person, per day to passengers' onboard accounts.

Wind Surf

The Verdict

An enlarged version of *Wind Star* and *Wind Spirit,* the 312-passenger *Wind Surf* is a sleek, sexy, supersmooth sailing ship with a large spa and lots of suites, along with an intimate, yachtlike ambience.

Wind Surf *(photo: Windstar Cruises)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	14,745	Crew	190
Passengers (double occ.)	312	Passenger/Crew Ratio	1.6 to 1
Passenger/Space Ratio	48	Year Launched	1990
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	154/0	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	2006

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	3.5
Appearance & Upkeep	3.5	Adventure & Fitness Options	5
Public Comfort/Space	4	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	4.5

Wind Surf is the pumped-up big sister of Windstar's smaller original vessels, the *Wind Star* and *Wind Spirit.* Built at French shipyard Societe Nouvelle des Ateliers et Chantiers du Havre, she originally sailed for Club Med Cruises (as *Club Med I*) until purchased by Windstar in 1997.

Despite a passenger capacity more than double that of her sister ships, *Wind Surf* maintains the feel of a private yacht, but also something more: Unlike almost any ship today, she mimics the size and flavor of some older, more intimate ocean liners, with a real seagoing feel that's rare among today's breed of cruise ships. In essence, *Wind Surf* is in a class by herself, offering one of the few cruise experiences that really bridges the gap between casual-luxe and adventure, at prices often as low as $1,650 per week.

In the spirit of keeping up appearances, in late 2006 *Wind Surf* had a multimillion-dollar face-lift that updated her public spaces and staterooms and added a pair of new luxury suites on the Bridge Deck, bringing the ship's capacity to 312 passengers.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Outside	$225	188	yes	yes	no	yes
Suite	$471	376	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS Decor is nearly identical in all cabins and suites, with white walls, varnished wood detailing, patterned upholstery and bedding, and understated carpets. Amenities include flatscreen TVs, DVD/CD players, Bose SoundDocks (usable with preloaded Apple iPod Nanos that you can check out from the reception desk), minifridges, terry-cloth bathrobes, large desks with granite tops, and full-length mirrors. At 188 square feet, the standard cabins are as large as some of the largest mainstream megaship cabins, and storage space is adequate, though not overly generous. During a late-2006 dry dock, every single stateroom and suite bathroom was redone. Sporting a more contemporary look, the well-designed bathrooms have updated cabinetry with open glass shelves, granite countertops, white porcelain sinks, new custom shower heads, new shower curtains, and an illuminated magnifying mirror. Fortunately, the lovely teak bathroom floors remain intact.

Thirty suites on Deck 3 (created by combining two regular staterooms) have a single large space divided into a comfortable sitting area and a bedroom, with a thick curtain to separate them as needed. They have his-and-hers bathrooms (each with shower and toilet) and two flat-panel TVs and DVD players. No cabins or suites have balconies or even picture windows. Instead, chunky portholes add to the ship's nautical ambience. Go with it. We loved 'em.

The 2006 remodeling also created two 500-square-foot plush suites on the Bridge Deck, carved out of the old conference room and Internet cafe. Each has a living and dining area, a separate bedroom, a walk-in closet, and a marble bathroom with a tub and separate shower. Posh perks for these suites include unpacking service, an invitation to dine with the captain, laundry and pressing service, evening appetizers, complimentary bottled water in the suite, chilled champagne upon arrival, and extra L'Occitane bath amenities.

Wind Surf has two elevators (unlike the other Windstar ships, which have none), but no cabins tailored for wheelchairs. The vessel is not recommended for people with serious mobility problems.

PUBLIC AREAS All around, *Wind Surf* is the roomiest of the three Windstar ships, with an airy layout and a passenger-space ratio that matches that of the luxe Seabourn ships.

The vessel's main public room is its nautically decorated **main lounge,** bright and airy with well-spaced tables for four spread around a decent-size dance floor and bandstand. Passengers gather here in the evening for cocktails, music, and port talks, as well as gambling in the adjoining casino. Aft, the **Compass Rose Bar** is the most popular spot aboard, with indoor/outdoor seating, a view over the wake, and music in the evenings. A second small stern lounge, the tiny, adorable **Terrace Bar,** is decorated with classic wood paneling and thick leather couches and bar stools, and has additional seating and tables just outside, on deck. In the evening, it's the spot for "Cigars Under the Stars" sessions.

Midships on Main Deck, just aft of the Lounge, the former library has been transformed into **The Yacht Club,** the ship's new social hub and Internet cafe, with an espresso bar, eight computers, and Wi-Fi access for your laptop. A large flatscreen TV anchors a cluster of comfy couches and chairs, and there's a library of books, CDs, and DVDs available for checkout. Nearby are four card tables and the ship's one shop, next to the main reception desk.

DINING OPTIONS *Wind Surf* offers three dining spots: the **Restaurant** on the Main Deck, a casual alternative venue on the Star Deck, and the buffet-style **Veranda** restaurant, also on the Star Deck. The Restaurant has 34 tables for two, making it easy for couples to get a romantic dinner alone. Dinners are open seating, served in a 2-hour window between 7:30 and 9:30pm. Dinner in the cozy alternative venue, named **Degrees,** is by reservation only and features a steakhouse menu 4 nights a week, and rotating menus from Northern Italy, France, and Indonesia the other nights.

As on the other Windstar ships, a combo buffet and a la carte breakfast and lunch are served in the glass-enclosed Veranda, which also has outdoor seating. Guests can also get grilled lobster, shrimp, ribs, hamburgers, hot dogs, sausages, veggie burgers, and vegetables from the **Grill,** right outside the Veranda's doors.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORT FACILITIES *Wind Surf* has the most elaborate fitness and spa facilities in the Windstar fleet, outclassing most facilities on other similar-size ships. At the spa, therapists dole out a variety of massages and other treatments in rooms that may look suspiciously familiar: They were created out of regular cabins when Windstar expanded the spa. Various spa packages geared to both men and women can be purchased in advance through your travel agent, with appointment times made once you're on board.

The ship's glass-walled gym is located on the Top Deck and is surprisingly well stocked for a vessel this size, with four treadmills, four bikes, several step machines and elliptical trainers, a full Cybex weight circuit, dumbbells, a ballet bar, and a rowing machine that uses water resistance. Up on deck, you'll find a schedule of yoga, Pilates, "Body Blitz," and self-defense classes for $11 a pop, plus free aerobics, stretching, and abdominals classes.

There are two pools on board: one on the Top Deck, beneath the sails, and another in the stern, alongside two hot tubs. Adjacent to the pools are recently installed Balinese sun beds. For joggers, a full-circuit teak promenade wraps around the Bridge Deck. The flying bridge is strung with two-person hammocks, providing a prime relaxation opportunity under the ship's billowing sails.

Wind Spirit • Wind Star

The Verdict

Two of the most romantic, cozy-yet-roomy small ships out there, these vessels look chic and offer just the right combination of creature comforts and first-class cuisine, along with a casual, laid-back, unstructured atmosphere.

Wind Spirit *(photo: Windstar Cruises)*

Specifications

Size (in tons)	5,350	Passenger/Crew Ratio	1.6 to 1
Passengers (double occ.)	148	Year Launched	
Passenger/Space Ratio	36	*Wind Spirit*	1988
Total Cabins/Veranda Cabins	74/0	*Wind Star*	1986
Crew	90	Last Refurbishment/Upgrade	2007

Frommer's Ratings (Scale of 1–5)

Cabin Comfort & Amenities	4	Dining Options	3.5
Appearance & Upkeep	3.5	Adventure & Fitness Options	2
Public Comfort/Space	4	Children's Facilities	N/A
Decor	4	Enjoyment Factor	4.5

These are great ships, combining high-tech design with the lines of a gracious private yacht, from their soaring masts to their needle-sharp bowsprits. They're the kind of lived-in, well-sailed vessels that a certain type of passenger latches on to forever and keeps coming back to year after year. In 2007, both ships received a refurbishment that spruced up their interiors and amenities.

Cabins & Rates

Cabins	Per Diems From	Sq. Ft.	Fridge	Hair Dryer	Sitting Area	TV
Outside	$286	188	yes	yes	no	yes
Suite	$443	220	yes	yes	yes	yes

CABINS All cabins are nearly identical, with a burgundy and navy color scheme, a flatscreen TV, a DVD/CD player, Bose SoundDocks (usable with Apple iPod Nanos that you can check out from the reception desk), a minibar, a pair of large round portholes with brass fittings, a compact closet, bathrobes, and fresh fruit. Like the ships' main public rooms, cabins have wood accents and trim, and are attractive and well constructed. Their square footage exceeds that of most small ships and matches the size of the largest standard cabins on the mainstream ships. Teak-decked bathrooms, rather large for ships this size, are better laid out than those aboard many luxury vessels, and contain a hair dryer and compact but adequate storage space. Another hair dryer (one with enough power to actually dry hair) is stowed out in the main cabin. Both ships have one Owner's Cabin that offers a little more breathing room, at 220 square feet.

Although all the cabins are comfortable, cabins amidships are more stable in rough seas—a rule of thumb aboard all ships. Note that the ships' engines, when running at full speed, can be a bit noisy.

This line is not recommended for passengers with serious physical disabilities or those who are wheelchair bound. There are no elevators on board, no wheelchair-accessible cabins, and many raised doorsills.

PUBLIC AREAS There aren't a lot of public areas on these small ships, but they're more than adequate, as passengers spend most of their time in port. The four main rooms include two restaurants, a library, and a vaguely nautical-looking **bar/lounge**

with cozy, partitioned-off nooks and clusters of comfy, caramel-colored leather chairs surrounding a wooden dance floor. This is where passengers congregate for port talks, pre- and post-dinner drinks, dancing, and performances by local musicians and dancers. A second bar is out on the Pool Deck and also attracts passengers before and after dinner for drinks and sometimes cigar smoking under the stars.

The small wood-paneled **library** manages to be both nautical and collegiate at the same time. Guests can read, play cards, or check out one of the hundreds of DVDs and CDs for use in their cabins. You can surf the Internet and send e-mail in the library; there's also Wi-Fi for laptop users.

DINING OPTIONS The elegant, dimly lit **main restaurant** is styled with teak trim and paneling, rope-wrapped pillars, navy blue carpeting and fabrics, and other nautical touches. It's the sole dinner venue and occasionally serves lunch as well. The **Veranda** breakfast and lunch restaurant is a sunny, window-lined room whose tables extend outdoors onto a covered deck. You have to go outside on deck to enter the restaurant, so if it's raining, you'll get wet.

POOL, FITNESS, SPA & SPORTS FACILITIES Each ship has a tiny swimming pool and an adjacent hot tub in the stern. Deck chairs around the pool can get filled during sunny days, but there's always space available on the crescent-shaped slice of deck above, outside the Veranda restaurant, and in a nice patch of deck forward of the bridge. The flying bridge is strung with two-person hammocks, providing a prime relaxation opportunity under the ship's billowing sails.

The ships' small gyms provide elliptical trainers, recumbent bikes, a ballet bar, free weights, and a flatscreen TV—not bad for ships this size. Deck 4 has an unobstructed wraparound deck for walkers. Massages, facials, and a few other treatments are available out of a single massage room next to the salon on Deck 1. Don't fault it just on size, though: One of the best massages we've ever had at sea was aboard *Wind Spirit.*

Part 3

The Ports

With guides to the 19 big U.S. and Canadian ports of embarkation, overviews of the major river cruise routes, and advice on things to see and do—on your own and via organized shore excursions—in nearly 60 ports of call.

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10 The Caribbean, The Bahamas & the Panama Canal

11 Alaska & British Columbia

12 The Mexican Riviera & Baja

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9

The Ports of Embarkation

At one time, cruises from the U.S. left only from the corners of the country—from Florida to the Caribbean, from New York and Boston to Canada's Maritimes and Bermuda, to Alaska from Vancouver (not in the U.S., but real close), and to the Mexican Riviera from L.A. and San Diego. That's already a lot of options, but the question remained: Why stop there? Both coasts are full of cities with excellent port facilities, and cruise ships are, after all, ships, not trains on rails. They can sail from anywhere, as long as the water's deep enough.

That realization began dawning on the cruise industry around the turn of the millennium, and today cities like Seattle, Galveston, Philadelphia, Houston, Baltimore, Norfolk, and even Bayonne, New Jersey, host cruise ships for all or part of each year.

In this chapter, we give you all the info on what to see and do in each of the 19 major U.S. and Canadian embarkation ports. Cruise lines generally offer **pre- and post-cruise hotel packages** for passengers wanting to extend their vacations or add in some decompression time between ship and home, but in case you want to make your own arrangements, we've also included some distinctive hotel and restaurant choices. **Hotel prices** listed here are standard rack rates for double rooms unless stated otherwise, and may be lower or higher, depending on what season you visit. For more extensive information on any of these cities, check the relevant Frommer's city, state, or regional guide.

PORTS NOT COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER **San Juan (Puerto Rico)** and **Honolulu (Hawaii)** are major ports of call as well as ports of embarkation, and therefore appear in chapters 10 and 14, respectively. Two other ports, **Jacksonville, Florida,** and **Mobile, Alabama,** are currently hosting only one ship apiece (Carnival's *Fascination* in Jacksonville and Carnival's *Fantasy* from Mobile), so they are not covered in this book. **Québec City** occasionally acts as a home port for Canada/New England cruises, but because it's more often a port of call, it's discussed in chapter 15.

DRIVING TO THE PORT All the ports in this chapter have **secure parking** for passengers who drive to their ships. We've included basic driving directions and parking prices in all the reviews. Your cruise line and/or travel agent will also provide info.

FLYING TO THE PORT If flying to the port of embarkation, you can take a taxi or purchase transfers from the cruise line to get you from the airport to the cruise port. We've included **taxi prices** in all these reviews, so compare them against your cruise line's **transfer prices** to see which you prefer. While cruise line transfers allow you to fall into the cruise line's warm embrace immediately (and meet some of your fellow passengers before you board), you'll often have to wait a while for the bus to load up and go. A taxi is speedier.

Choosing a Chain

In addition to the hotels listed in this chapter, the following big motel and hotel chains are represented in most of the port cities.

- **Best Western** ✆ 800/780-7234; www.bestwestern.com
- **Clarion** ✆ 877/424-6423; www.clarionhotel.com
- **Comfort Inn** ✆ 800/424-6423; www.comfortinn.com
- **Comfort Suites** ✆ 800/424-6423; www.comfortsuites.com
- **Courtyard by Marriott** ✆ 888/236-2427; www.courtyard.com
- **Days Inn** ✆ 800/329-7466; www.daysinn.com
- **Doubletree** ✆ 800/222-8733; www.doubletree.com
- **Econo Lodge** ✆ 800/424-6423; www.econolodge.com
- **Holiday Inn** ✆ 888/465-4329; www.holiday-inn.com
- **Howard Johnson** ✆ 800/466-4656; www.hojo.com
- **Motel 6** ✆ 800/466-8356; www.motel6.com
- **Quality Inn** ✆ 800/424-6423; www.qualityinn.com
- **Red Roof Inns** ✆ 800/733-7663; www.redroof.com

1 Anchorage, Alaska

Anchorage, which started as a tent camp for workers building the Alaska Railroad in 1914, stands between the Chugach Mountains and the waters of upper Cook Inlet. It was a sleepy railroad town until World War II, when the opening of a couple of military bases livened things up a bit. Even so, Anchorage did not start becoming a city in earnest until the 1950s, when the Cold War (and Alaska's proximity to the ol' "Evil Empire") spurred a huge investment in infrastructure.

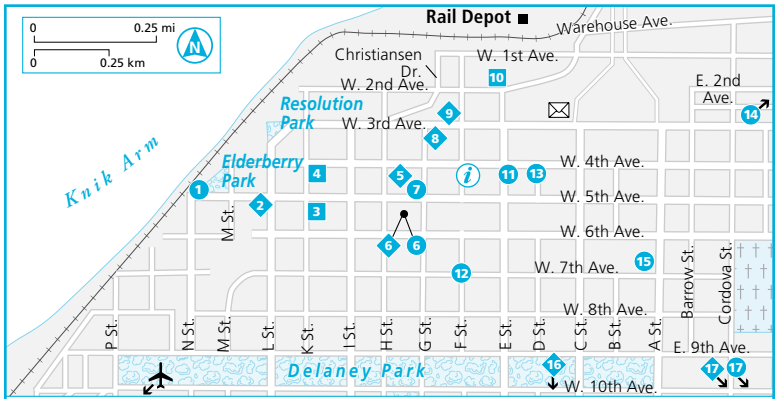
Today, Anchorage enjoys the distinction of being incorrectly perceived as the state capital by just about everybody in the Lower 48, simply because it seems so obvious that it should be. (Trivial Pursuit answer: Juneau is the real capital; see chapter 11.) It also boasts good restaurants, worthwhile museums, shops, a few small historic attractions, and the must-do **Tony Knowles Coastal Trail** in and around its walkable if not thrillingly attractive 8-by-20-block downtown. Outside town, the world-class **Alaska Native Heritage Center** is a 26-acre celebration of Alaska's five major Native groups. And always, of course, there is wilderness—so close that moose regularly annoy the city's gardeners, and bears sometimes amble through town.

Plan to spend at least a half- or full day here. If you have time, plan another half-day at the Native Heritage Center or a day trip about 50 miles south along the incredibly scenic inlet known as **Turnagain Arm.**

GETTING TO ANCHORAGE & THE PORT

If arriving by plane before the cruise, you'll land at the **Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport** (✆ **907/266-2526;** www.dot.state.ak.us/anc), located within city limits, a 10- to 15-minute drive from downtown. **Taxis** run about $25 for the trip. By car, there is only one road into Anchorage from the rest of the world: the Glenn Highway. The other road into town, the Seward Highway, leads up from the Kenai Peninsula.

Downtown Anchorage



ACCOMMODATIONS ■
Anchorage Grand Hotel **10**
Copper Whale Inn **2**
Hotel Captain Cook **4**
Voyager Hotel **3**

DINING & NIGHTLIFE ◆
Arctic Roadrunner **16**
Glacier Brewhouse **5**
Marx Brothers Café **9**
Orso **6**
Sack's Café **8**
Seven Glaciers Restaurant **17**
Simon and Seafort's Saloon and Grill **2**

ATTRACTIONS & SHOPPING ●
Alaska Native Heritage Center **14**
Alaska Zoo **17**
Anchorage Museum of History and Art **15**
"History of Anchorage" mural **12**
Imaginarium **7**
Old City Hall **11**
Oomingmak Musk Ox Producers' Co-operative **6**
Oscar Anderson House **1**
Rusty Harpoon **13**
Tony Knowles Coastal Trail **1**

If ending the trip in Anchorage, you'll probably arrive via the port towns of **Seward** or **Whittier.** The reason is speed: From the south, cruising around the Kenai Peninsula to get to Anchorage would add another day to itineraries, so the vast majority of ships dock instead in southerly Seward (about 125 miles from Anchorage, on the southeast coast of the Kenai) or Whittier (in the northwestern waters of Prince William Sound, about 60 miles southeast of Anchorage), and then shuttle passengers to the city by bus or train.

GETTING AROUND Most **car-rental** companies operate at the airport. **Taxis** are available in town at a rate of $2 per mile plus a $2 initial fee. Anchorage's $1.75-per-ride People Mover **bus system** is an effective way of getting to and from the top attractions and activities. Day passes are an excellent deal at $4, allowing unlimited rides.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Shore excursions in Anchorage often carry restrictions based on whether (and when) you're sailing from Seward or Whittier and whether you're staying over in Anchorage proper.

Prince William Sound Kayaking ($99, 3½ hr.): Departing from Whittier, this tour takes you to one of Prince William Sound's deep-water fjords for a guided paddle around gorgeous waterfalls and rock formations.

Resurrection River Float Trip ($80, 3 hr.): Board an eight-person piloted raft for a relaxing 8-mile float down the Resurrection, starting from a spot near the base of Exit Glacier. The trip is whitewater-free.

EXPLORING ANCHORAGE ON YOUR OWN

Anchorage's downtown area is pleasant, but don't expect an old-fashioned Alaskan town: Most of its buildings were leveled in the big 1964 earthquake, which at a magnitude of 9.2 was more powerful than the one that generated 2004's deadly Southeast Asia tsunami. Today, downtown Anchorage is thoroughly modern, albeit in an Alaskan way, with stretches of touristy shops interspersed with government buildings, shops for locals, a few seedy sections, and occasional dashes of homespun public art: Check out Bob Patterson's **"History of Anchorage" mural** at Seventh Avenue and F Street, which depicts exactly that. At Fourth Avenue and E Street, the 1936 **Old City Hall** has an interesting display of city history in its lobby, including dioramas of the early streetscape.

Our pick for number-one downtown activity is taking a walk along the **Tony Knowles Coastal Trail,** which allows for gorgeous views over the waters of Knik Arm. The trail runs through downtown and the arm for about 11 miles, from the western end of Second Avenue to Kincaid Park. You can hop on at several points, including via **Elderberry Park,** at the western end of Fifth Avenue, where you'll also find the **Oscar Anderson House** museum (✆ **907/274-2336**). Built in 1915 for Swedish butcher Anderson and his family, it's a quaint dwelling surrounded by a lovely little garden, with a tour that provides a glimpse into the city's short history. Furnishings include a working 1909 player piano. Admission is $3.

The **Anchorage Museum of History and Art,** 121 W. Seventh Ave., between A and C streets (✆ **907/343-4326;** www.anchoragemuseum.org), is the state's largest museum. Most visitors tour the large Alaska Gallery, an informative and enjoyable walk through the history and some of the anthropology of the state and its Native peoples. The art galleries present Alaskan works from yesterday and today, along with photos of pre-quake Anchorage and Alaskan pop-culture artifacts. The museum gets Alaska's best touring and temporary exhibits, and its restaurant, operated by the excellent Marx Brothers Café (see below), serves some of the best lunches downtown. At press time, the museum was undergoing a major expansion that will add display space and a planetarium, bring more than 600 Alaska Native artifacts from the Smithsonian in Washington, create a 2-acre public park for outdoor exhibits and recreation, and carve out space so that the Imaginarium (see below) can move on-site. The new facilities are due to be completed in early 2010. In the meantime, admission costs $8. A $26 combo ticket will also get you a free shuttle and admission to . . .

. . . the 26-acre **Alaska Native Heritage Center,** 8800 Heritage Center Dr. (✆ **800/315-6608;** www.alaskanative.net), located about 15 minutes from downtown Anchorage. Opened in 1999, the center introduces visitors to the lives and cultures of the state's five major Alaska Native groupings: the southeast's Tlingit, Eyak, Haida, and Tsimshian tribes; the Athabascans of the interior; the Inupiat and St. Lawrence Island Yupiks of the far north; the Aleuts and Alutiiqs of the Aleutian Islands; and the Yup'ik and Cup'ik tribes of the extreme west. A central "Welcome House" holds a small museum displaying some remarkable Native carvings and masks; a workshop where Native craftspeople demonstrate their techniques; a theater presenting a rotating series of films on Native culture; and a rotunda where storytelling,

dance, and music performances are presented throughout the day. Outside, spaced along a walking trail around a small lake, are five traditional dwellings representing the five Native cultures and regions. Native staffers are on hand at each to provide information about the dwellings. Though the center is offered as a shore excursion by most ships, it's worth going on your own if you're interested in Native culture, because the tours don't give you enough time to experience all the place has to offer. Admission is $25. A free shuttle leaves regularly from the Anchorage Museum, the Anchorage Visitor Center at Fourth Avenue and F Street, and several other sites. Times are posted at all pickup points, or call ✆ **907/330-8000.**

If you're traveling with children, Anchorage provides a few kid-centric options, including the **Imaginarium,** 737 W. Fifth Ave., between G and H streets, Ste. 140 (✆ **907/276-3179;** www.imaginarium.org), and a science museum with a strong Alaska theme to many of the displays, including a saltwater touch tank. Admission is $5.50 adults, $5 kids. The **Alaska Zoo,** 4731 O'Malley Rd., about 8 miles from downtown (✆ **907/346-2133;** www.alaskazoo.org), is another option, with gravel paths meandering through the woods past natural flora and local wildlife such as polar and brown bears, seals and otters, musk oxen, Dall sheep, moose, caribou, and waterfowl—most of which you may see on your cruise, but not this close up. There are also elephants, Siberian tigers, yaks, and Bactrian camels, which you won't see from the ship unless you're having flashbacks. Admission is $12 adults, $6 kids. To get here, take either the old or the new Seward Highway south to O'Malley Road, turn left, and travel for about 1½ miles.

ATTRACTIONS IN SEWARD & WHITTIER

Most people pass through Seward and Whittier without a second glance on their way to Anchorage, but if you have time, there are a few interesting sights to see in these two port towns. In Seward, the spectacular **Alaska SeaLife Center,** right on the waterfront at Mile 0 of the Seward Highway (✆ **800/224-2525;** www.alaskasealife.org), allows scientists and visitors (the latter through windows) to study the sea lions, porpoises, sea otters, harbor seals, fish, and other forms of marine life that abound in the area, as well as the umpteen species of local seabirds. Admission costs $20 adults, $10 kids ages 4 to 11.

As for Whittier, the most amazing thing about the town is that almost the entire population lives in a single 14-story concrete building known as **Begich Towers.** It was built during the 1940s, when Whittier's strategic location on the Alaska Railroad and at the head of a deep Prince William Sound fjord made it a key port in the defense of Alaska, and after a while everybody just migrated here to make things easier. Eventually, businesses opened here as well, including a small grocery store and a medical clinic. Kids don't even have to go outside to get to school in winter—a tunnel leads right from the tower to the school building.

SHOPPING

Many stores in Anchorage carry Native-looking arts and crafts, but most are just touristy knockoffs. Give 'em your back and head for the good stuff instead. The **Oomingmak Musk Ox Producers' Co-operative,** 604 H St., at Sixth Avenue (✆ **888/360-9665** or 907/272-9225; www.qiviut.com), is a co-op owned by 250 Alaska Native women in villages across the state. All of their products are knitted from qiviut (*kiv*-ee-oot), the light, warm, silky underhair of the musk ox, which is collected from shedding animals. Each

village has its own knitting pattern. Items are expensive—adult caps start at $175, scarves at $245—but considering the rarity and beauty of the work, they're really a bargain. The website has a "letters" page with notes sent by the knitters, discussing their work. The **Rusty Harpoon,** 411 W. Fourth Ave. (✆ **907/278-9011;** www.rustyharpoongifts.com), also has authentic Native items and less expensive crafts, and the longtime proprietors only buy direct from Native artists they know.

WHERE TO STAY

Rooms can be hard to come by in Anchorage in the summer, so be sure to arrange lodging as far in advance of your trip as possible, whether through your cruise line or on your own. Here are some good options:

The **Hotel Captain Cook,** Fourth Avenue and K Street (✆ **800/843-1950;** www.captaincook.com), is Alaska's great, grand hotel, where royalty and rock stars stay. Rates: from $260. The all-suite **Anchorage Grand Hotel,** 505 W. Second Ave. (✆ **888/800-0640;** www.anchoragegrand.com), has a superb central location; large, quiet suites with bedroom, living room, and kitchen; and amenities such as free high-speed Internet. Rates: from $199. The small, unpretentious, and centrally located **Voyager Hotel,** 501 K St. (✆ **800/247-9070;** www.voyagerhotel.com), also has large, light rooms with kitchens. Rates: from $209. The casual **Copper Whale Inn,** 440 L St. (✆ **907/258-7999;** www.copperwhale.com), takes up a pair of clapboard houses overlooking Elderberry Park right on the coastal trail downtown, with charming rooms of every shape and size. Rates: from $210 (rooms with shared bathroom from $185).

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

Though hardly a culinary or nightlife capital, Anchorage does have a few good restaurants if you want an evening out before or after your cruise. For a fun, casual experience, the **Glacier Brewhouse,** 737 W. Fifth Ave. (✆ **907/274-BREW** [274-2739]; www.glacierbrewhouse.com), has an ever-changing menu of tasty, eclectic dishes served in a large dining room with lodge decor, where the scent of the wood-fired grill hangs in the air. They brew their own hearty beers behind a glass wall. If it's crowded (and it often is), head for the large bar area, where you can just hover like a vulture until a table opens up. Main courses: $11 to $37. The **Marx Brothers Café,** 627 W. Third Ave. (✆ **907/278-2133;** www.marxcafe.com), began as a hobby among three friends and has become a standard of excellence in the state. The cuisine is varied and creative, ranging from Asian to Italian, but everyone orders the Caesar salad made at the table. The decor and style are studied casual elegance. Main courses: $36 to $38.

Sack's Cafe, 328 G St. (✆ **907/274-4022;** www.sackscafe.com), is the most fashionable restaurant in Anchorage, and one of the best, with an ever-changing menu that mixes Alaskan seafood with Italian influences and eclectic touches. Main courses: $18 to $34. **Orso,** 737 W. Fifth Ave. (✆ **907/222-3232;** www.orsoalaska.com), serves superb wood-grilled steaks and locally caught seafood, as well as excellent pastas, all in an ornate dining room. Main courses: $19 to $38. **Simon and Seafort's Saloon and Grill,** 420 L St. (✆ **907/274-3502;** www.simonandseaforts.com), is one of Anchorage's great dinner houses, with a turn-of-the-20th-century decor, a cheerful atmosphere, and fabulous sunset views of Cook Inlet. Prime rib and seafood are the specialties. Main courses: $16 to $49. Lighter meals are served at the bar. For the best, most original takeout burgers in town, head for **Arctic Roadrunner,** with locations at

2477 Arctic Blvd., at Fireweed Lane (✆ **907/279-7311**), and 5300 Old Seward Hwy., at International Airport Road (✆ **907/561-1245**). Try the Kodiak Islander, which has peppers, ham, onion rings, and who knows what else on top.

For a memorable dining experience out of town, the Mount Alyeska Resort's **Seven Glaciers Restaurant** (✆ **800/880-3880;** www.alyeskaresort.com) has views that match its name. Located 2,300 feet up a tramway on the mountainside, the restaurant serves trendy and beautifully presented dinners in a sumptuous dining room floating above the clouds. Notable menu selections include the cold smoked and grilled Alaskan salmon and the Alaskan king crab. Main courses: $39 to $59. The resort is on Arlberg Avenue in Girdwood, a funky little town 37 miles south of Anchorage along Turnagain Arm.

2 Baltimore, Maryland

"Charm City" has welcomed visitors since 1729. Founded as a shipping and shipbuilding town and later transformed into a manufacturing center, the city rode the new-economy wave of the '90s with more service industries and nonprofits. Today, tourism plays an ever-increasing role in the local economy, with a combination of historical sites, museums, and a revitalized harbor area drawing visitors and now cruise lines, too.

GETTING TO BALTIMORE & THE PORT

All cruise vessels depart from the Port of Baltimore's **South Locust Point Marine Terminal,** 2001 E. McComas St., about 5 miles from the Inner Harbor, where many of the best attractions and hotels are located. If you're arriving by plane, you'll likely fly into **Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport** (✆ **800/I-FLY-BWI** [435-9294]; www.bwiairport.com), located 10 miles south of downtown Baltimore, off I-295 (the Baltimore-Washington Pkwy.). To get to Baltimore, follow I-195 west to Rte. 295 north, which will take you into downtown. **Taxis** to the port or downtown hotels run about $22. **SuperShuttle** (✆ **800/258-3826;** www.supershuttle.com) also operates vans every half-hour between the airport and all major downtown hotels for about $12 per person one-way, $18 round-trip.

If you're driving to the port from I-95 north or south, take Keith Avenue/exit 56. Turn left on Keith Avenue until it merges into Broening Highway, and take this 1 mile to the Seagirt Marine Terminal. Use the terminal entrance. Parking costs $7 per day.

GETTING AROUND If you plan to stay near the Inner Harbor, it's easiest to walk or take **Ed Kane's Water Taxi** (✆ **800/658-8497;** www.thewatertaxi.com), which charges $9 for an all-day pass. There's also regular metered taxi service to get you to the port. On foot, you only have to know a few streets to get your bearings. The **promenade** around the Inner Harbor will take you to Federal Hill and the American Visionary Art Museum, the Maryland Science Center, Harborplace, the USS *Constellation,* and the National Aquarium. The promenade extends along the water through the Harbor East neighborhood to Fells Point and Canton. It makes for a pretty walk. **Pratt** and **Lombard streets** are the two major east-west arteries just above the Inner Harbor. **Charles Street** is Baltimore's main route north and home to some good restaurants. **St. Paul Street** is the major route south. If you're driving around, expect things to be fairly easy. The streets are on a straight grid, and many are one-way. All the major **car-rental** companies have offices at the airport.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Baltimore City Tour ($42, 2½ hr.): Take in Baltimore's historic sites, visiting the Harborplace, Babe Ruth's birthplace, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore's Washington Monument, Fort McHenry, and the historic ships berthed at the seaport.

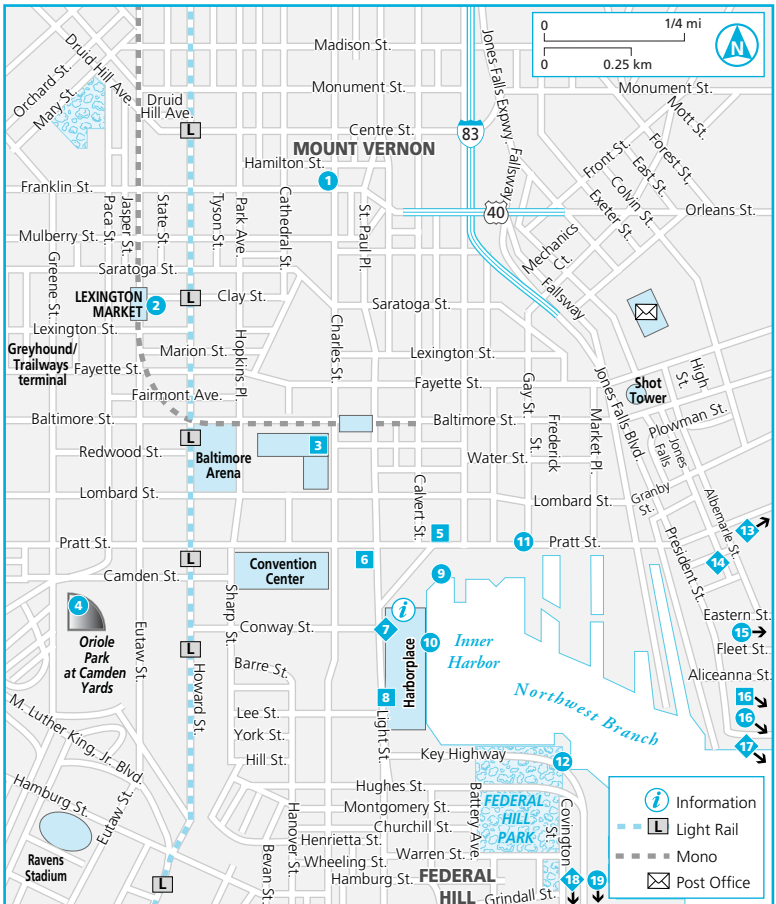
EXPLORING BALTIMORE ON YOUR OWN

Baltimore's **Inner Harbor** is the starting point for most visitors. Once a major seaport, the freight business ground to a halt in the 1960s, but it's been a destination for pleasure boaters and tall ships since the city began revitalizing the area in the late '70s. In addition to **restaurants** and extensive **shopping** (see p. 378), there are a number of historic attractions in the neighborhood. The **Baltimore Visitor Center,** adjacent to Harborplace at 401 Light St., has a short film that introduces you to the city, along with all the usual brochures and maps.

The **USS *Constellation,*** moored at 301 E. Pratt St. (✆ **410/539-1797;** www.constellation.org), is a stunning, triple-masted sloop of war originally launched in 1854. It's the last Civil War–era vessel afloat. Tour the gun decks, visit the wardrooms, see a cannon demonstration, and learn about the life of an old-time sailor. Admission is $10. More seagoing history is to be had at the **Baltimore Maritime Museum** (✆ **410/396-3453;** www.baltomaritimemuseum.org). Located at Piers 3 and 5, it's really four museums in one. The Coast Guard Cutter *Taney* survived the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the submarine USS *Torsk* sank the last two Japanese merchant ships of World War II, and the lightship *Chesapeake* spent 40 years anchored near the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. The "screwpile"-style Seven-Foot Knoll Lighthouse looks more like a New England UFO than a traditional lighthouse. Built in 1856, it marked the entrance to Baltimore's harbor for 133 years before being moved to its current location. Admission to the lighthouse is free. Admission to all four ships is $8 adults, $7 kids. Tickets are available at Pier 3, in front of the National Aquarium, and at the USS *Constellation* Building on Pier 1.

At the nearby **National Aquarium,** 501 E. Pratt St. (✆ **410/576-3800;** www.aqua.org), visitors can walk into a room surrounded by patrolling sharks, wander among the coral reefs, follow the yearly migration of fish, and visit a rainforest on the roof at one of the best aquariums in the country. Though you walk in front of most of the exhibits, you get to actually walk *inside* the doughnut-shaped Coral Reef and the Open Ocean shark tanks. There's also a Marine Mammal Pavilion that's home to a family of dolphins and an exhibit re-creating an Australian river gorge and a "4-D" movie theater. Admission costs $25 adults, $15 kids (or $30 adults, $20 kids including the dolphin experience and the movie).

Oh, say, can you see by the dawn's early light? Apparently Francis Scott Key could, back in 1814, when the British attacked star-shaped **Fort McHenry,** which sits on a point in the harbor at the end of East Fort Avenue (✆ **410/962-4290;** www.nps.gov/fomc). It was the sight of the fort's enormous 15-star flag that showed the fort's 1,000 defenders had held their ground, halting the British offensive and inspiring the U.S. national anthem. After that day, the fort never again came under attack, but it remained an active fort on and off for the next hundred years. Today, it's both a National Park and a National Historic Shrine and still flies its huge flag, which takes about 20 people to manage when it's raised and lowered daily. Stop by at 9:30am or 4:30pm (7:30pm June–Aug) to join in. The fort's buildings display historical and military memorabilia, and you can tour the restored barracks, commander's quarters,



CRUISE TERMINAL 19

ATTRACTIONS & SHOPPING
- American Visionary Art Museum **12**
- Baltimore Maritime Museum **9**
- Broadway Market **15**
- Fort McHenry **16**
- Harborplace **10**
- Lexington Market **2**
- National Aquarium **11**
- Oriole Park at Camden Yards **4**
- USS *Constellation* **9**
- Walters Art Museum **1**

ACCOMMODATIONS
- Admiral Fell Inn **16**
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DINING & NIGHTLIFE
- Bertha's **16**
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- Cat's Eye Pub **16**
- Nick's Fish House **18**
- Obrycki's **13**
- Sabatino's **14**
- Tír na Nóg **7**
- Vaccaro's **14**

guardhouse, and powder magazine. Admission is $7 for adults, free for kids 15 and under.

The **Walters Art Museum,** 600 N. Charles St. (✆ **410/547-9000;** www.thewalters.org), with its collections of ancient art, medieval armor, and French 19th-century paintings, has always been one of Baltimore's great attractions, telling the story of Western civilization through its permanent collection that covers some 55 centuries. Admission is free; closed Monday and Tuesday.

For something different, visit the **American Visionary Art Museum,** 800 Key Hwy., at the base of historic Federal Hill on the south side of the Inner Harbor (✆ **410/244-1900;** www.avam.org). You can't miss it: Just look for the multicolored, 55-foot wind-powered sculpture out front. As defined by the museum, visionary art is "art produced by self-taught individuals, usually without formal training, whose works arise from an innate personal vision that revels foremost in the creative act itself." This can range from narrative embroideries by Holocaust survivors to the 10-foot model of the *Lusitania* that dominates a first-floor gallery—made from 193,000 matchsticks. All in all, it's some of the most interesting art you'll ever see. Admission is $14 for adults, $8 for kids; closed Monday.

Baseball fans will want to catch a game at **Oriole Park at Camden Yards,** 333 W. Camden St. (✆ **410/685-9800;** www.theorioles.com). If there's a home game during your visit, do whatever it takes to get a ticket: It's a real Baltimore experience. Games are usually held at 1:35 or 7:35pm, with tickets going for between $9 and $80.

SHOPPING

The Inner Harbor is Baltimore's prime shopping district, with malls and hundreds of shops. **Harborplace** (✆ **410/332-4191;** www.harborplace.com) is actually three separate locations with more than 160 stores. Between them, they sell everything from onion rings to diamond rings. The **Light Street Pavilion** has the most food stalls and restaurants, with some souvenir shops. The **Pratt Street Pavilion** has specialty stores, clothing and jewelry shops, and more restaurants. The **Gallery,** a mall connected to the Renaissance Harborplace Hotel, has three floors of shops and a food court on the fourth.

For a more classic taste of the city, head to one of its centuries-old markets. The 200-year-old **Broadway Market,** on South Broadway between Fleet and Lancaster streets in Fells Point, has two large covered buildings staffed by local vendors selling fresh produce, flowers, crafts, and an assortment of ethnic and raw-bar foods, ideal for snacking, a quick lunch, or a picnic. You'll even find an old-fashioned Baltimore tradition: "sweet potatoes," soft white candies powdered with cinnamon. The **Lexington Market,** 400 W. Lexington St. (✆ **410/685-6169;** www.lexingtonmarket.com), claims to be the oldest continuously operating market in the United States, having opened for business in 1782. This Baltimore landmark on downtown's west side houses more than 140 merchants, selling prepared ethnic foods (for eat-in or takeout), fresh seafood, produce, meats, baked goods, sweets, and even freshly grated coconut. It's worth a visit for the aromas, flavors, sounds, and sights, as well as good shopping. Bring cash, as credit cards are not accepted. Closed Sunday.

WHERE TO STAY

A number of hotels are located in the Inner Harbor and Fells Point neighborhoods, the latter Baltimore's original seaport and home to the first shipyards. Both are a maximum of 7 miles from the cruise terminal.

The **Hyatt Regency Baltimore,** 300 Light St. (✆ **800/233-1234;** http://baltimore.hyatt.com), was the Inner Harbor's first hotel 20 years ago and still has its best location, just a few steps from everything. Rooms have breathtaking harbor views; the amenities are terrific. Rates: from $199.

The **InterContinental Harbor Court Baltimore,** 550 Light St. (✆ **800/824-0076;** www.harborcourt.com), strives for quiet dignity, refinement, and graciousness, with exquisitely furnished rooms. Rates: from $280.

The **Renaissance Harborplace Hotel,** 202 E. Pratt St. (✆ **800/468-3571;** www.renaissanceharborplace.com), is also located right in the middle of everything, across the street from Harborplace and the Inner Harbor. Rooms are very large, and many have great views. Rates: from $259.

The French Renaissance–style **Radisson Plaza Lord Baltimore,** 20 W. Baltimore St. (✆ **800/333-3333;** www.radisson.com), opened in 1928, so if you love grand old hotels with modern conveniences, this is the one for you. The entrance features marble columns, handcarved artwork, brass fixtures, and chandeliers, and the Inner Harbor is only 5 blocks away. Rates: from $169.

In Fells Point (southeast of the Inner Harbor), the **Admiral Fell Inn,** 888 S. Broadway (✆ **866/583-4162;** www.harbormagic.com), is composed of seven buildings built between 1790 and 1920, and blends Victorian and Federal-style architecture. Originally a boardinghouse for sailors, later a YMCA, and then a vinegar-bottling plant, the inn now has an antiques-filled lobby and library and guest rooms individually decorated with Federal period furnishings. Rates: from $199.

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

Baltimore used to be very quiet after dark, but not anymore. We suggest heading to the Inner Harbor or Fells Point for some of the town's legendary seafood and an evening out.

Fells Point, the neighborhood where Baltimore began, is one of the city's best areas for seafood, and the benchmark of all the eateries here is **Obrycki's,** 1727 E. Pratt St. (✆ **410/732-6399;** www.baltimorecrabhouse.com). This is the quintessential crab house, where you can crack open steamed crabs in their shells and feast on the tender, succulent meat. There's crab soup, crab cocktail, crab balls, crab cakes, crab imperial, and soft-shell crabs, and the rest of the menu is just as tempting. Main courses: $15 to $30. It's closed November through mid-March. At the **Black Olive,** 814 S. Bond St. (✆ **410/276-7141;** www.theblackolive.com), a Greek taverna just beyond the busier streets of Fells Point, the combination of Greek fare and the freshest seafood is magic. Choose the catch of the day and trust the chef to make it wonderful. Main courses: $27 to $40. Reservations required.

At the festive Harborplace development, try **Tír na Nóg** (✆ **410/483-8968;** www.tirnanogbaltimore.com), a cosmopolitan Irish pub with great Inner Harbor views, a gorgeous interior, and an urbane menu. For dinner, try the hearty crab soup followed by the roasted trout and Irish bacon with crab butter. Main courses: $10 to $21.

If you're geographically adventurous, **Nick's Fish House,** 2600 Insulator Dr. (✆ **410/347-4123;** www.nicksfishhouse.com), is a great seafood choice. It's in a very industrial area on the Patapsco River, about 2½ miles south of the Inner Harbor, but the crab cakes are delicious and a good value, the service is friendly and efficient, and the atmosphere is Baltimore–meets–Eastern Shore casual. It's worth going out of your way for this place. Main courses: $15 to $26.

Baltimore's Little Italy is located between the Inner Harbor and historic Fells Point, and offers both casual and fancy restaurants. We like **Sabatino's,** 901 Fawn St. (✆ **410/727-9414;** www.sabatinos.com), for pasta and garlicky salad dressing just like Nonna used to make. Main courses: $13 to $30.

To top off a perfect day, drop by **Vaccaro's,** 222 Albemarle St. in Little Italy, near Fells Point (✆ **410/685-4905;** www.vaccarospastry.com), for Italian desserts, coffee, and cappuccino. There's also a location at the Light Street Pavilion in Harborplace. For something more sudsy and musical, head to Fells Point, where the **Cat's Eye Pub,** 1730 Thames St. (✆ **410/276-9866;** www.catseyepub.com), has live music every night, from Irish folk to zydeco. **Bertha's,** 734 S. Broadway (✆ **410/327-5795;** www.berthas.com), has live jazz or blues nearly every night, as well as a large menu heavy on seafood and pub grub.

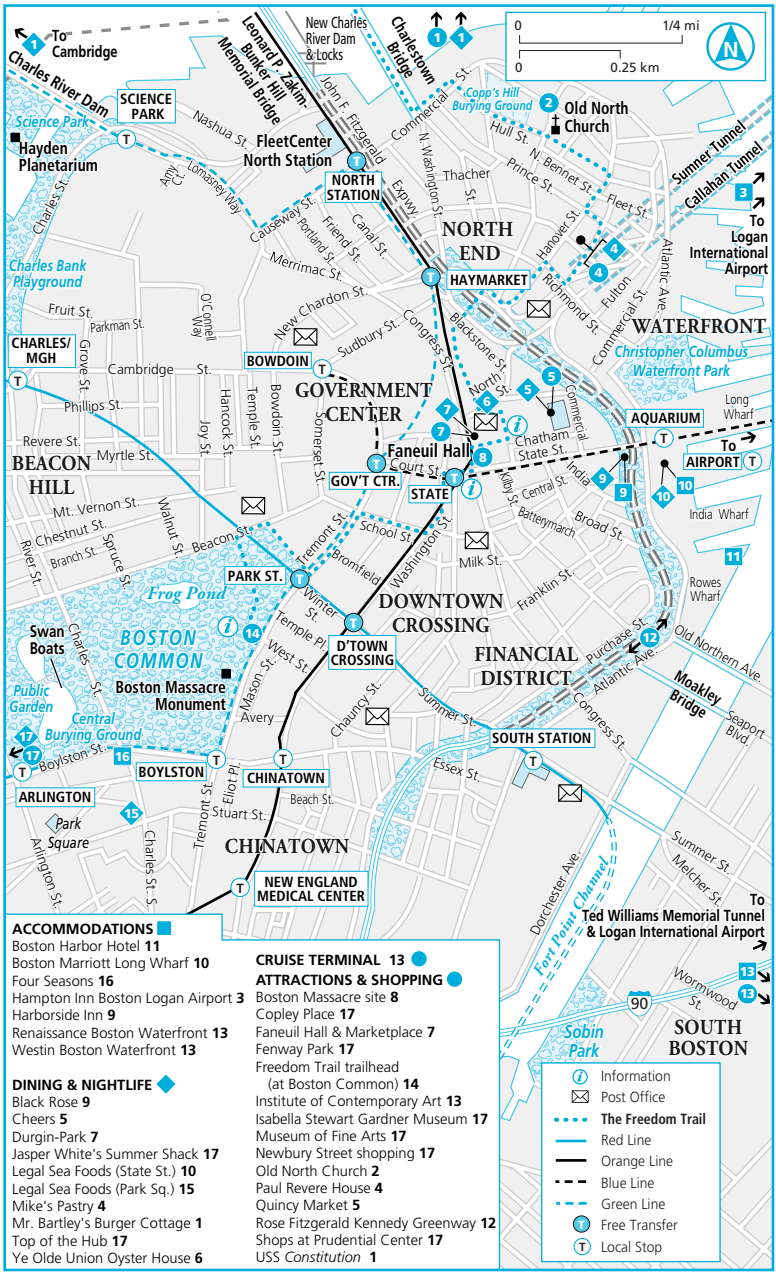
3 Boston, Massachusetts

Founded in 1630, Boston is a port of call on many itineraries from New York and is also an embarkation port for a handful of Bermuda and New England/Canada cruises (many of the latter terminating in Montréal). Of all the New England ports, it has perhaps the richest history, dating from the earliest days of America's settlement through the Revolution and beyond. Wend your way through the city's many important historical sites via the Freedom Trail walking tour, which includes **USS *Constitution*** (aka "Old Ironsides") and the **Paul Revere House.** In other neighborhoods, stroll past the beautiful Victorian-era town houses in the stylish Back Bay area, take in the Federal architecture of Beacon Hill, or head across the Charles River to Cambridge for a romp around the classic red-brick campus of **Harvard University,** founded nearly 400 years ago. Then again, you can skip the past and focus on pure fun, whether it's shopping (perhaps at **Faneuil Hall Marketplace**) or pub hopping—the beloved *Cheers* bar (at least the exterior used in the opening credits) is on Beacon Street, while a replica of the interior is in Faneuil Hall Marketplace.

GETTING TO BOSTON & THE PORT

Ships dock at the **Black Falcon Cruise Terminal** (✆ **617/330-1500;** www.massport.com/ports/cruis.html) at 1 Black Falcon Ave., in the Boston Marine Industrial Park on the South Boston Waterfront, also called the Seaport District. There's nothing at the industrial park except ships and sheds, but the heart of Boston is only a couple of miles away, and tour buses and taxis line up to meet cruise passengers. By air, you'll arrive at Boston's **Logan International Airport** (✆ **800/23-LOGAN** [235-6426]; www.massport.com/logan) in East Boston, 3 miles across the harbor from downtown. A **taxi** to the port costs about $20 for two passengers; the drive through the Ted Williams Tunnel takes about 10 to 15 minutes, depending on traffic.

If you're coming by car from the Massachusetts Turnpike traveling east, go past the I-90/I-93 interchange and enter the tunnel eastbound. In the tunnel, take exit 25/South Boston. At the traffic lights, you'll be at Congress Street. Continue forward onto B Street. At the next signal, turn right onto Seaport Boulevard. Keep straight onto Northern Avenue and proceed into the Marine Industrial Park. Continue to the end, turn right onto Tide Street, and make an immediate left onto Drydock Avenue. Follow Drydock Avenue as it turns right at the end of the Boston Design Center. Turn right again onto Black Falcon Avenue. Parking costs $15 per day.



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GETTING AROUND The best way to see the historic heart of Boston is on foot. Alternatively, you can sign up for one of your ship's organized tours or hop on the **Beantown Trolley shuttle** (www.beantowntrolley.com), which makes a continuous circuit among Boston's top sites. You can hop on or off at any of them, and then catch the next shuttle when you're ready to move on. Tickets are $12 to $15, depending on the month. You can also grab a **taxi** at the pier and drop about $15 for the 3-plus-mile ride to Boston Common, a good starting point for walking tours. Once in town, spend the day walking or take advantage of Boston's efficient subway system, the **"T"** (short for MBTA; ✆ **800/392-6100** or 617/222-3200; www.mbta.com), which has stops all over the city. Subway fares are $1.70 to $2, bus fares are $1.25 to $1.50, or you can pay $9 for a 1-day pass that allows unlimited travel on both.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Freedom Trail Walking Tour ($39, 4 hr.): You can easily do this well-marked walk on your own, but it's also a good choice if you'd like a guide to explain the highlights.

Beacon Hill Walking Tour ($49, 3 hr.): A guided walking tour goes from the Back Bay neighborhood past Trinity Church, along Newbury Street with its boutiques and cafes, and through the lush Public Garden, with a stop for a quick beer at the *Cheers* pub, inspiration for the classic TV show. Move on to Boston Common, the narrow streets and brick sidewalks of Beacon Hill, and finally to Quincy Market.

The Path of Paul Revere ($49, 4 hr.): This bus ride follows the route of Paul Revere's famous ride to Lexington. In Concord, drive along "Author's Row" for views of the homes of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Louisa May Alcott. In Lexington, see where 77 Minutemen faced 700 British soldiers in the first engagement of the American Revolution.

Lexington & Concord Tour ($119, 7½ hr.): Outside Boston, the towns of Lexington and Concord witnessed the first battles of the Revolutionary War. The tour includes the Old North Church; Lexington Green, where the first skirmish of the war took place; and the North Bridge, where the American militia met the British forces. Most tours also stop at Harvard Yard, the USS *Constitution,* and for lunch at Ye Olde Oyster House, America's oldest continuously operating restaurant.

EXPLORING BOSTON ON YOUR OWN

Boston's cruise port is in an industrial section of town. The Institute of Contemporary Art museum (see p. 383) is within easy walking distance, but downtown and most attractions lie a short distance away by taxi, shuttle, or public transit.

Visitors in town for just a day will probably want to concentrate on the city's famed **Freedom Trail,** a 2½-mile route that links 16 historic sites, many of them associated with the American Revolution and the country's early days. The route begins at **Boston Common,** the country's oldest public park (dating to 1640), and cuts across downtown, passing through the busy shopping area around Downtown Crossing, the Financial District, and the North End, on the way to Charlestown. A line of red paint or red brick on the sidewalk marks the route, markers identify the stops, and plaques point the way from one stop to the next. The free *Where Boston* magazine (available at the cruise terminal) contains a route map.

Many of the stops along the route will be familiar to anyone who studied American history in school. At State and Devonshire streets, a ring of cobblestones on a traffic island marks the spot where, on March 5, 1770, colonists threw snowballs,

garbage, rocks, and other debris at a group of redcoats, who responded by firing into the crowd and killing five men. That incident, which became known as the **Boston Massacre,** helped consolidate the spirit of rebellion in the colonies. At Dock Square (Congress and North sts.), **Faneuil Hall** was built in 1742 and was a site for speeches by orators such as Samuel Adams (whose statue stands outside) in the years leading to the Revolution. In later years, abolitionists, temperance advocates, and suffragists also used the hall as a pulpit.

Detour before the North End to wander for a block or two (or more) along the **Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway,** which parallels the downtown waterfront. Where an elevated interstate once loomed, a ribbon of parkland, sculpture, fountains, and greenery delights Bostonians and visitors of all ages. In the North End, the **Paul Revere House,** 19 North Sq. (✆ **617/523-2338;** www.paulreverehouse.org), is the home from which Revere set off on April 18, 1775, riding to Lexington to warn the local militias that British troops were on the march. The 2½-story wood structure is the oldest house in downtown Boston, built around 1680 and bought by Revere in 1770. Inside, 17th- and 18th-century furnishings and artifacts—including the famous Revere silver—re-create the period. Admission is $3.50. A few blocks away, the **Old North Church,** 193 Salem St. (www.oldnorth.com), is the place where sexton Robert Newman hung two lanterns from the steeple on the night of Revere's ride, as a signal that British troops were setting out for Lexington in boats, rather than on foot ("One if by land, and two if by sea"). Requested donation is $3.

At the Charlestown Navy Yard, **USS *Constitution*** (✆ **617/242-5670;** www.oldironsides.com) is one of the U.S. Navy's six original frigates, constructed between 1794 and 1797 using bolts, spikes, and other fittings from Paul Revere's foundry. As the new nation built its naval and military reputation, the *Constitution* played a key role, battling French privateers and Barbary pirates, repelling the British fleet during the War of 1812, participating in 40 engagements, and capturing 20 vessels. The frigate earned its nickname, "Old Ironsides," during a battle on August 19, 1812, when shots from HMS *Guerriere* bounced off its thick oak hull as if it were iron. The ship is still a commissioned vessel of the U.S. Navy, and the active-duty sailors who lead tours wear 1812 dress uniforms. A museum **(www.ussconstitutionmuseum.org)** is adjacent.

Beyond Revolutionary sites, Boston offers several wonderful museums. Its **Museum of Fine Arts,** 465 Huntington Ave. (✆ **617/267-9300;** www.mfa.org), is one of the nation's best, known for its collections of Impressionist paintings (including one of the largest collections of Monets outside of Paris), Asian and Old Kingdom Egyptian collections, classical art, Buddhist temple art, and medieval sculpture and tapestries. Admission is $17. The **Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum,** 280 The Fenway (✆ **617/566-1401;** www.gardnermuseum.org), was created by its namesake, who designed her home in the style of a 15th-century Venetian palace and filled it with European, American, and Asian paintings and sculpture, including works by Titian, Botticelli, Raphael, Rembrandt, Matisse, James McNeill Whistler, and John Singer Sargent. Admission is $12 for adults, free for kids and for adults named Isabella. The **Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston,** 100 Northern Ave. (✆ **617/478-3100;** www.icaboston.org), mounts rotating exhibits of 20th- and 21st-century paintings, sculpture, photography, and video and performance art at its dramatic waterfront home near the cruise terminal. Admission is $12.

Not far from the MFA and the Gardner is **Fenway Park,** home field of the 2004 and 2007 World Series champions. Game tickets are nearly impossible to get, but tours (✆ **617/226-6666;** www.redsox.com) run every day, year-round. Stops may include the press box, the Red Sox Hall of Fame, and even a walk on the warning track. Check ahead for schedules; no tours on holidays or before day games. Admission is $12.

SHOPPING

The top shopping area is Boston's **Back Bay,** with dozens of classy galleries, shops, and boutiques on **Newbury Street,** a world-famous destination. Nearby, the **Shops at Prudential Center** and **Copley Place** (linked by an enclosed walkway across Huntington Ave.) make up a giant retail complex that includes the posh department stores **Neiman Marcus** and **Saks Fifth Avenue.** The adjacent **South End,** though less commercially dense, boasts a number of art galleries and quirky shops. Another popular spot is **Faneuil Hall Marketplace,** bounded by North, Congress, and State streets and Atlantic Avenue (✆ **617/523-1300;** www.faneuilhallmarketplace.com). Amid the national chain outlets at Boston's busiest attraction are shops, boutiques, and pushcarts that sell everything from cookies to costume jewelry, sweaters to souvenirs.

WHERE TO STAY

You have a lot of choices in Boston's many appealing neighborhoods, from B&Bs to boutique hotels and major chains—but don't expect bargains. Rates are generally on the high side during spring and summer, and are steepest during fall foliage season.

Two hotels are near the cruise port. The **Westin Boston Waterfront,** 435 Summer St. (✆ **800/WESTIN-1** [937-8461]; www.westin.com), at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center, offers the usual abundant Westin amenities—including "Heavenly Beds"—and lovely water views. Rates: from $259.

The **Renaissance Boston Waterfront Hotel,** 606 Congress St. (✆ **800/HOTELS-1** [468-3571]; www.marriott.com), opened in 2008 adjacent to the Seaport World Trade Center. The spacious, well-appointed guest rooms have the latest in high-tech appointments and striking harbor views. Rates: from $169.

The **Boston Harbor Hotel,** 70 Rowes Wharf, at the waterfront and Faneuil Hall Marketplace (✆ **800/752-7077;** www.bhh.com), is one of the finest and prettiest choices in town, a 16-story brick building that's within walking distance of downtown and the waterfront attractions. It prides itself on top-notch service. Rooms have wonderful harbor and skyline views. Rates: from $295.

The **Boston Marriott Long Wharf,** 296 State St. (✆ **800/228-9290;** www.marriottlongwharf.com), affords easy access to downtown and waterfront attractions, and lovely harbor views. The terraced brick exterior of the seven-story, 389-room hotel is one of the most recognizable sights on the waterfront. Rates: from $249.

You get a lot for your money at the **Harborside Inn,** 185 State St. (✆ **888/723-7565;** www.harborsideinnboston.com), a renovated 1858 warehouse across the street from Faneuil Hall Marketplace and the harbor. The nicely appointed rooms have queen-size beds and contemporary decor. Rates: from $179.

You can't beat the **Four Seasons,** 200 Boylston St. (✆ **800/819-5053;** www.fourseasons.com), for exquisite service, a beautiful location, elegant guest rooms and public areas, a terrific health club, and wonderful restaurants. If you can afford it, this is unquestionably the place to stay. Each room in the 16-story brick-and-glass building has a great view. Rates: from $475.

The **Hampton Inn Boston Logan Airport,** 2300 Lee Burbank Hwy., Revere (✆ **800/426-7866;** www.hamptoninn.com), is on an ugly commercial-industrial strip, but it's just 1½ miles from the airport and 3 miles from downtown Boston. A free 24-hour shuttle bus serves the 227-room hotel, transporting guests to and from the airport and nearby restaurants. The hotel also has a pool, and the rates include continental breakfast. Rates: from $139.

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

Downtown, people have poured into **Durgin-Park,** 340 Faneuil Hall Marketplace (✆ **617/227-2038;** www.durgin-park.com), since 1827 for huge portions of delicious food, famously cranky waitresses, and a rowdy atmosphere where CEOs share tables with students. Feast on prime rib the size of a hubcap, lamb chops, fried seafood, and roast turkey. Fresh seafood arrives twice daily. Main courses: $10 to $30. If you want to check out America's oldest restaurant (which also happens to be Boston's best raw bar), visit **Ye Olde Union Oyster House,** 41 Union St. (✆ **617/227-2750;** www.unionoysterhouse.com). The place opened in 1826 and looks much the same as it did then, with a menu of traditional New England seafood. Daniel Webster and John Kennedy were regulars. Main courses: $20 to $32.

In Cambridge, **Jasper White's Summer Shack,** 149 Alewife Brook Pkwy. (✆ **617/520-9500;** www.summershackrestaurant.com), is a one-of-a-kind 300-seat place with picnic-table-style seating and baby blue leather booths. It serves the chef's signature pan-roasted lobster, plus all kinds of seafood, from clam rolls to steamers (not to mention corn dogs). Go for the food and the experience. Main courses: $6 to $29. (Another location in the Back Bay, at 50 Dalton St., is smaller but not much quieter at busy times, especially before Red Sox games; ✆ **617/867-9955.**) For more mainstream dining, there's **Legal Sea Foods** (www.legalseafoods.com), a family-run chain known for its top-quality seafood. There are 10 locations around Boston and Cambridge, including 255 State St., on the waterfront (✆ **617/742-6300**); 26 Park Sq., between Columbus Avenue and Stuart Street (✆ **617/426-4444**); and in the Shops at Prudential Center, 800 Boylston St. (✆ **617/266-6800**). Main courses: $11 to $35. **Legal Test Kitchen,** 225 Northern Ave. (✆ **617/330-7430**), not far from the cruise port, is a spinoff that serves eclectic international food. In Harvard Square, go to **Mr. Bartley's Burger Cottage,** 1246 Massachusetts Ave. (✆ **617/354-6559;** www.bartleysburgers.com), famous for its burgers, onion rings, and down-to-earth atmosphere. Most items are under $10.

Boston's Italian-American enclave, the North End, has dozens of restaurants; many are tiny and don't serve dessert or coffee. To satisfy those cravings, hit the *caffès* for coffee and fresh pastry in an atmosphere where lingering is welcome. Check out **Mike's Pastry,** 300 Hanover St. (✆ **617/742-3050;** www.mikespastry.com), a bakery that's famous for its bustling takeout business and its cannoli.

Boston's bar scene was the inspiration for the TV show *Cheers.* The Bull & Finch Pub, the original bar that inspired the show, is now known as **Cheers Beacon Hill,** 84 Beacon St. (✆ **617/227-9605;** www.cheersboston.com). Another Cheers, at Quincy Market in Faneuil Hall Marketplace (✆ **617/227-0150;** www.cheersboston.com), has an interior modeled after the one in the show. Nearby, the jam-packed **Black Rose,** 160 State St. (✆ **617/742-2286;** www.irishconnection.com), books live Irish music. The breathtaking 52nd-floor view makes the lounge at **Top of the Hub,** in the Prudential Tower, 800 Boylston St. (✆ **617/536-1775;** www.topofthehub.net), a favorite destination for dessert, drinks, and live jazz.

Nightlife listings can be found in the city's two main newspapers, the ***Boston Globe*** and ***Boston Herald,*** or in free publications (available at newspaper boxes around town) such as the weekly ***Boston Phoenix*** and the biweekly ***Improper Bostonian*** and ***Stuff@Night.***

4 Cape Canaveral & Cocoa Beach, Florida

Known as the "Space Coast" because of **Kennedy Space Center,** the Cape Canaveral/Cocoa Beach/Melbourne area boasts 72 miles of beaches, plus fishing, golfing, and surfing. The area is only about an hour west of Orlando's theme parks, which explains why Port Canaveral is one of the busier cruise ports on the East Coast, offering many 3- and 4-night cruise options (often sold as packages with pre- or post-cruise visits to the Orlando resorts) as well as weeklong itineraries. It also serves as a port of call for some ships sailing southbound from New York, allowing day-trip access to the Orlando parks.

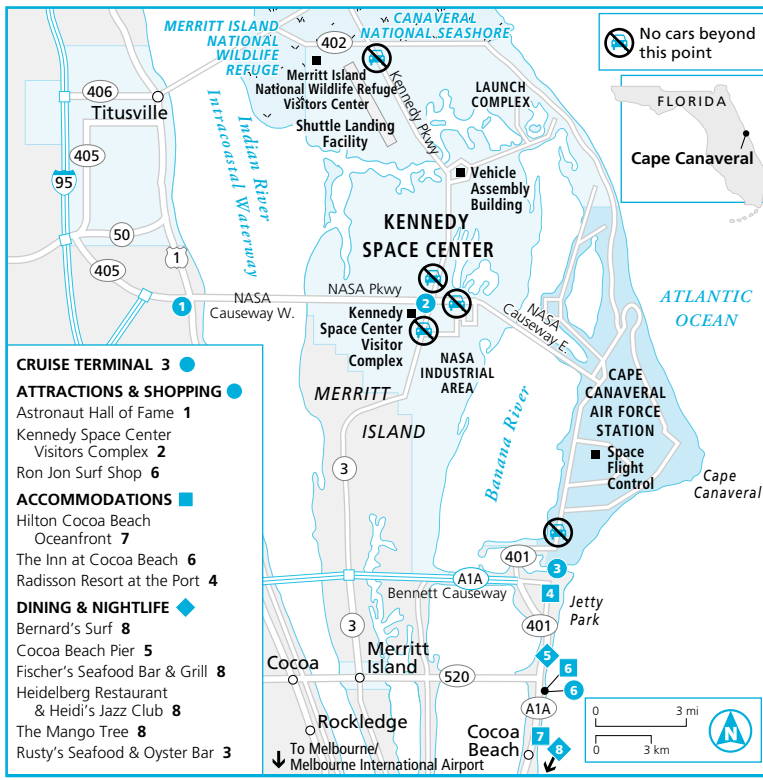
Outside the port area, Cape Canaveral is . . . well, it's no Miami. Highways, strip malls, chain stores, and tracts of suburban homes predominate from the port area south into Cocoa Beach, home to most of the hotels, restaurants, and beaches discussed here. The central areas of Cocoa Beach are mildly more interesting, with some great '50s and '60s condo and hotel architecture, but stylish they're not. In the other direction, much of the land around the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is set aside as the **Canaveral National Seashore** and the **Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge** (www.nbbd.com/godo/minwr), a prime destination for nature lovers.

GETTING TO CAPE CANAVERAL & THE PORT

Port Canaveral is at the eastern end of the Bennett Causeway, just off S.R. 528 (the Bee Line Expwy.), the direct route from Orlando. From the port, S.R. 528 turns sharply south and becomes S.R. A1A, portions of which are known as Astronaut Boulevard and North Atlantic Avenue. For information about the port, contact the **Canaveral Port Authority** (✆ **888/767-8226** or 321/783-7831; www.portcanaveral.org). Those flying in will probably land at the **Orlando International Airport** (✆ **407/825-2001;** www.orlandoairports.net), a 45-mile drive from Port Canaveral via S.R. 528, or **Melbourne International Airport** (www.mlbair.com), a straight drive from I-95 to S.R. 528. If you've booked air and/or transfers through your cruise line, a representative will meet you. Otherwise, **Cocoa Beach Shuttle** (✆ **888/784-4144** or 321/631-4144; www.cbshuttle.com) has shuttle service between Orlando's airport and Port Canaveral; a one-way trip costs $30 per person or $55 for two people. By taxi, the fare from Orlando to Port Canaveral is a hefty $100-plus; but taxis charge the same rate for up to nine passengers, so if you're traveling with a group, this might be a good option. From the Melbourne Airport, the **Melbourne Airport Shuttle** (✆ **321/724-1600**) will take you to most local destinations for about $10 to $20 per person.

By car, Port Canaveral and Cocoa Beach are accessible from virtually every interstate highway along the East Coast. Most visitors arrive via Rte. 1, I-95, or S.R. 528. Parking at the port costs $12 a day.

GETTING AROUND Having a car is vital here. Most **car-rental** companies operate at the Orlando airport. **Space Coast Area Transit** (✆ **321/633-1878;**



www.ridescat.com) operates buses, but routes tend to be circuitous and, therefore, extremely time-consuming. Fares are $1.25.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

In addition to the tour below, lines typically offer pre- and post-cruise stays in Orlando, for the theme parks. Disney Cruise Line (of course) is the leader in linking passengers to Orlando, with *Disney Wonder*'s 3- and 4-night itineraries specifically designed to dovetail with 4- and 3-night stays at the Disney resorts.

Kennedy Space Center VIP Tour ($79, 6 hr.): Participants on this tour get access to otherwise off-limits areas of the U.S. space center, meet a real astronaut, touch a piece of Mars, and stand inches from the largest rocket ever built.

THE ORLANDO THEME PARKS

All it took was a sprinkle of pixie dust in the 1970s to begin the almost-magical transformation of Orlando from a swath of swampland into the most visited tourist destination in the world. Today, it's home to three giants—Walt Disney World, Universal Orlando, and SeaWorld—with 7 of the 10 most popular theme parks in the United States. Many cruises from Port Canaveral are sold as land-sea packages that include park stays, but if you decide to visit Orlando before or after your cruise, it's essential

to plan ahead. Otherwise, the number of attractions begging for your time and the hypercommercial atmosphere can put a serious dent in your psyche, your wallet, and your stamina. Even if you had 2 weeks, it wouldn't be long enough to hit everything, so don't even try. Stay selective, stay sane. That's our motto. Here's some basic info on each of the main parks. If you plan to spend a considerable amount of time here, we suggest picking up a copy of *Frommer's Walt Disney World & Orlando 2010.*

WALT DISNEY WORLD

Walt Disney World is the umbrella above four theme parks: the **Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Hollywood Studios,** and **Animal Kingdom,** which welcome about 50 million people each year. Besides its theme parks, Disney has two water parks, several entertainment venues, and a number of shopping spots. It's all southwest of Orlando off I-4, west of the Florida Turnpike. For information, vacation brochures, and videos, contact the Walt Disney World Co. (✆ **407/934-7639;** www.disneyworld.com) at least 6 weeks in advance of your trip.

TICKET PRICES & HOURS At press time, 1-day, one-park tickets for any one of the four parks were a whopping $79 for adults, $68 for children 3 to 9 (plus tax). Discounted multiday, multipark tickets are available; many land-sea cruise packages include these passes. Park hours vary, so call ahead or go to **www.disneyworld.com** to check. Generally, expect hours to be from 9am to 8pm (until 6pm for Animal Kingdom), though the parks may open earlier and close later depending on special events and the economy. Epcot is usually open from 10am to 9pm.

THE MAGIC KINGDOM The most popular theme park on the planet offers some 40 attractions, plus restaurants and shops, in a 107-acre package. Its symbol, **Cinderella Castle,** forms the hub of a wheel whose spokes reach to seven "lands" simulating everything from an Amazonian jungle to Colonial America. If you're traveling with little kids, this is the place to go.

EPCOT This 260-acre park (the acronym stands for Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow) has two sections. **Future World** is centered on Epcot's icon, a giant geosphere that looks like a big golf ball. Major corporations sponsor this section's themed areas, and the focus is on discovery, scientific achievements, and tomorrow's technologies in areas running from energy to undersea exploration. The **World Showcase** is a community of 11 miniaturized nations surrounding a 40-acre lagoon. All of these "countries" have indigenous architecture, landscaping, restaurants, and shops; cultural facets are explored in art exhibits, dance or other live performances, and innovative films. Epcot definitely appeals more to adults than children, even though it has a few thrill rides. If they're a requirement, go elsewhere. ***Note:*** Hiking through this park will often exhaust even the fittest person—some folks say Epcot really stands for "Every Person Comes Out Tired"—so we recommend splitting your visit over 2 days if possible.

DISNEY'S HOLLYWOOD STUDIOS You'll probably spy the **Earrfel Tower**—a water tower outfitted with gigantic mouse ears—before you enter this 110-acre park, which Disney bills as "the Hollywood that never was and always will be." You'll find pulse-quickening rides such as the Aerosmith-themed **Rock 'n' Roller Coaster** and the **Twilight Zone Tower of Terror,** movie- and TV-themed shows such as **Jim Henson's Muppet*Vision 3D,** and some wonderful street performers. Adults and kids both love it. Best of all, it can be done comfortably in a day.

ANIMAL KINGDOM This 500-acre park combines animals, elaborate landscapes, and a handful of rides. Because it's as much a conservation venue as an attraction, it's easy for most of the animals to escape your eyes (unlike at Tampa's Busch Gardens, the state's other major animal park). The thrill rides are better at Busch (though **Expedition Everest** will get your adrenaline pumping), but Animal Kingdom has much better shows, such as ***Festival of the Lion King*** and ***Finding Nemo—the Musical.*** The park is good for both adults and children and can be done in a single outing, but if you come on a hot summer day, arrive early or it's unlikely you'll see many of the best animals, which are smart enough to seek shade.

UNIVERSAL ORLANDO

Universal Orlando (✆ **877/801-9720** or 407/363-8000; www.universalorlando.com) is Disney's number-one competitor in the ongoing "anything you can do, we can do better" theme-park brawl. Although it's a distant second in terms of attendance, it's unquestionably the champion at entertaining teenagers and older members of the thrill-ride crowd, with two major parks—**Universal Studios Florida** and **Islands of Adventure**—plus an entertainment district and several resorts. It's at Universal Boulevard, off I-4.

TICKET PRICES & HOURS A 1-day, one-park ticket costs $79 for adults, $68 for children 3 to 9 (plus 6.5% tax); a two-park unlimited admission ticket, good for 7 consecutive days, runs $85 for adults and children alike. The parks are open 365 days a year, generally from 9am to 6pm, though often later, especially in summer and around holidays. Call to confirm hours before you go.

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS FLORIDA Even with fast-paced, grown-up rides such as **Revenge of the Mummy** and **Men in Black Alien Attack,** Universal Studios Florida is fun for kids. A talented group of actors portraying a range of characters from Universal films usually roams the park. You can do the park in a day, although you'll be a bit breathless when you get to the finish line.

ISLANDS OF ADVENTURE This 110-acre theme park is, bar none, *the* Orlando theme park for thrill-ride junkies. With areas themed on Dr. Seuss, Jurassic Park, and Marvel comics, the park successfully combines nostalgia with state-of-the-art technology. Roller coasters roar above pedestrian walkways; water rides slice through the park. The **Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man** is a 3-D track ride that is arguably the best all-around attraction in Orlando; the **Jurassic Park River Adventure** has a 70-foot drop that scared creator Steven Spielberg into jumping ship before going over; and both the **Incredible Hulk Coaster** and **Dueling Dragons** draw raves from coaster crazies. Unless it's the height of high season, the park can be done in a day. It is not, however, a park for families with young kids: 9 of the park's 14 major rides have height restrictions. If, however, you have teens or are an adrenaline junkie, this is definitely the place for you.

SEAWORLD

A 200-acre marine-life park, **SeaWorld** (✆ **800/327-2424** or 407/351-3600; www.seaworld.com) explores the deep in a format that combines conservation awareness with entertainment—basically what Disney is attempting at Animal Kingdom, but SeaWorld got here first, and its message is subtler and a more integrated part of the experience. The park is fun for everyone from small children to adults (who doesn't like dolphins and whales?) and is easily toured in a single day. The pace is much more laid

back than at Universal or Disney, so it makes for a nice break if you're in the area for several days. SeaWorld has a handful of high-tech roller coasters such as **Journey to Atlantis** and **Kraken,** but, all in all, the park can't compete in this category with Disney and Universal. On the other hand, those parks don't let you discover the crushed-velvet texture of a stingray or the song of a sea lion, not to mention the killer whale **Shamu,** the park's star attraction, and the other resident orcas. The park entrance is at the intersection of I-4 and S.R. 528 (Bee Line Expwy.).

Tip: SeaWorld's latest adventure park, **Aquatica,** made its debut in spring 2008. The 59-acre eco-themed water park blends its signature up-close animal encounters with high-energy thrills (including racing tunnels and raft rides, slides, and more) with a plethora of pools, lagoons, winding rivers, and stretches of white sandy beaches. For additional information call ✆ **888/800-5447** or go to **www.aquaticabyseaworld.com**.

TICKET PRICES & HOURS A 1-day ticket to SeaWorld costs $75 for ages 10 and over, $65 for children 3 to 9 (plus 6.5% tax). The park is usually open from 9am to 6pm, later during summer and holidays. Admission to Aquatica costs $45 for adults, $39 for kids ages 3 to 9. Combination passes for both parks are available.

EXPLORING CAPE CANAVERAL & COCOA BEACH ON YOUR OWN

Port Canaveral probably wouldn't be on the cruise industry's radar if it weren't so close to Orlando, and most passengers shuttle directly from theme park to pier rather than spending any significant time here. Nevertheless, anyone interested in the space program and its history should plan to arrive a day early (or stay a day after) to check out Kennedy Space Center and the Astronaut Hall of Fame. There are also a number of attractive beaches.

KENNEDY SPACE CENTER & THE ASTRONAUT HALL OF FAME

Set amid 150,000 acres of marshy wetlands favored by birds, reptiles, and amphibians, the **Kennedy Space Center (KSC)** (✆ **321/449-4444;** www.kennedyspacecenter.com) has been at the center of America's space program since 1969, when astronauts took off from here to the moon. Even if you've never really considered yourself a science or space buff, you can't help being impressed by the achievements represented here. The only public access to the center (Hwy. 405) leads directly to the **Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex,** which has real NASA rockets, the actual Mercury Mission Control Room from the 1960s, and numerous exhibits and films portraying space exploration from the '50s to the present day. There's a rocket garden displaying now-obsolete Redstone, Atlas, Saturn, and Titan rockets; a daily "Encounter" with a real astronaut; several pricey dining spots; and an obligatory gift shop selling various space memorabilia and souvenirs. Two space-related IMAX movies (one in 3-D) shown on five-and-a-half-story-high screens are informative and entertaining.

While you could spend an entire day at the visitor complex, you must take the included **KSC Tour** or an optional, extra-cost tour to see the actual space center, where rockets and shuttles are prepared and launched. Buses for the included tour operate continuously, leaving every 15 minutes and making stops at the **LC-39 Observation Gantry,** with a dramatic 360-degree view over launchpads where space shuttles blast off, and the impressive **Apollo/Saturn V Center,** which includes artifacts, photos, interactive exhibits, and the 363-foot **Saturn V,** the most powerful rocket ever launched by the United States. At each stop, you can get off, look around,

and then take the next bus that comes along. Plan to take the tour early in your visit and be sure to hit the restroom before boarding—there's only one restroom on the tour. Several **optional, extra-cost tours** get you closer to sights like the Space Shuttle launchpads, the massive Vehicle Assembly Building, and the original launch sites of the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo programs. Optional tours frequently sell out in advance, so call ahead for reservations.

At the Visitor Complex, don't miss the **Astronaut Memorial,** a moving black-granite monument with the names of U.S. astronauts who have died on missions or during training. The 60-ton structure rotates on a track that follows the movement of the sun, causing the names to stand out above a brilliant reflection of the sky.

Near the intersection of routes 1 and 405, across the Indian River to the west of KSC, the **U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame** has displays, exhibits, and tributes to the heroes of the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo space programs. Film presentations introduce visitors to the origins of rocketry and to the sheer power of the rockets themselves, while displays of personal memorabilia provide insight into the astronauts' lives. Displays of NASA memorabilia include actual Mission Control terminals (at which you can sit to access interactive information) and, most mind-blowing of all, the actual Apollo 14 command module *Kitty Hawk,* whose plaque bears the inscription "This spacecraft flew to the moon and back January 31 February 9, 1971." Enough said.

But let's get down to brass tacks. The Astronaut Hall of Fame has one main thing that the rest of the KSC Visitor Complex doesn't: the chance to pretend you're an astronaut through various ways, including a **G-force simulator** that spins at high speed to four times the force of gravity; a **Mission to Mars** rover that sends you bumping over the surface of the Red Planet (this one can be skipped if you're short on time); and a **Walk on the Moon** that imitates weightlessness, using harnesses and counterweights. Now the warnings: Simulators are off limits to folks under 48 inches, and if you tend to suffer from motion sickness, you'll probably want to avoid everything except the Walk on the Moon. Also, be sure to allow at least a few minutes between simulations, even if you've got a cast-iron constitution. Trust us on this one.

Kennedy Space Center is accessible via S.R. 405, just off U.S. 1. The Visitor Complex, including the Astronaut Hall of Fame, is open daily, except Christmas and certain launch days, from 9am to 5:30pm. The last bus tour departs at 2:15pm from the Visitor Complex. Regular admission (including all exhibits, Astronaut Encounter, IMAX space films, the KSC tour, and the Astronaut Hall of Fame) is $38 for adults, $28 for kids 3 to 11. Parking at the Visitor Complex and Hall of Fame is free, but there is no shuttle between the two. Be sure to pick up maps as you enter each branch, and expect to spend most of the day here to get the full experience: You'll need at least 2 hours to see the Visitor Complex (plus another couple to see the IMAX films), another 2 hours to see the highlights of the included tour (plus another 2 or 3 hr. if you linger at the tour stops or take one of the guided tours), and at least *another* 2 hours to see the Astronaut Hall of Fame.

BEACHES

Though the Cape Canaveral/Cocoa Beach area doesn't have the spectacular beach culture of Miami, it doesn't lack for pleasant coastline, much of which is famous for surfing. The following beaches (or "parks" in the local lingo) are within an easy drive of the port area. Closest to the cruise ship port and actually part of the larger port

complex, the clean, nicely landscaped 4½-acre **Jetty Park,** 400 E. Jetty Rd. (✆ **321/783-7111;** www.portcanaveral.org/recreation/beaches.php#jetty), is the most elaborate of the local beaches, perched at a point from which the whole expanse of the Cape Canaveral/Cocoa Beach coastline stretches away to the south. A snack bar, restrooms, showers, picnic facilities, a children's playground, and fishing are available. Parking costs $7 per car. Follow the signs after entering the port area, near where S.R. 528 and the A1A intersect. A series of beaches are accessible (and generally signposted) off the A1A heading south from the port. The **Cocoa Beach Pier,** on Meade Avenue east of the A1A (✆ **321/783-7549;** www.cocoabeachpier.com), is a great surfing spot with an open-air bar, volleyball, and a party atmosphere. **Lori Wilson Park,** farther south at 1500 N. Atlantic Ave. (✆ **321/868-1123;** www.brevardparks.com/nature/loriwilson.htm), is another nicely landscaped area on the order of Jetty Park, with restrooms and showers; a rustic boardwalk with some shaded picnic areas and benches; a nature center; and the Hammock, a .25-mile boardwalk nature trail that winds past ferns, twisted trees, and other *Jurassic Park*–like foliage, while butterflies flutter by and spiders eye them from their webs. Parking is free.

SHOPPING

Let's be unkind: You could shop here, but why bother? Cape Canaveral and Cocoa Beach have mostly the kind of national mall chains that you've probably got at home, so save your energy and dollars for the Caribbean. An exception—as much for the experience as for the goods—is the **Ron Jon Surf Shop,** 4151 N. Atlantic Ave./A1A (✆ **321/799-8888;** www.ronjons.com). Inside, the blue-and-yellow, South Beach–looking Art Deco building has enough au courant beachwear to transform you and a good-size army into surfer dudes. The store also rents beach bikes, body boards, surfboards, kayaks, beach chairs, and other equipment by the hour, day, or week. It's open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

WHERE TO STAY

While the area has a wealth of cheap beach hotels, we'll instead concentrate on the few that are really notable.

The **Radisson Resort at the Port,** 8701 Astronaut Blvd./A1A (✆ **800/333-3333;** www.radisson.com/capecanaveralfl), is only a 5-minute drive from the port and has comfortable rooms. Even more comfy are the two-room suites that are a great option for families, each featuring a bedroom with a Jacuzzi and living room with a sofa bed. Cruise passengers arriving by car can leave their vehicles free in the hotel's lot during their cruise and take the free Radisson shuttle to and from the port. Rates: from $149.

At the other end of the spectrum, the **Inn at Cocoa Beach,** 4300 Ocean Beach Blvd., just off the A1A behind the Ron Jon Surf Shop (✆ **800/343-5307;** www.theinnatcocoabeach.com), is almost entirely couples-oriented, presenting itself as more of a personalized inn than a traditional hotel. Almost all of its 50 romantic B&B-style rooms face the ocean and have rocking chairs on their balconies. The hotel staff includes several parrots and dogs, and guests are treated to daily breakfast, afternoon tea, and evening wine-and-cheese socials. Rates: from $125.

The six-story **Hilton Cocoa Beach Oceanfront,** 2080 N. Atlantic Ave. (✆ **800/445-8667** or 321/799-0003; www.hilton.com), is one of the few upscale beachfront properties here, with rooms that are spacious and comfortable, but weirdly lacking in balconies. Rates: from $169.

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

Bernard's Surf, 2 S. Atlantic Ave., Cocoa Beach (✆ **321/783-2401**), was opened by Bernard Fischer in 1948, and its photos testify to the many astronauts who've celebrated their safe return to Earth with the restaurant's steak and seafood. The latter is provided by the Fischer family's own boats. At the same address, **Fischer's Seafood Bar & Grill** is a *Cheers*-like lounge popular with the locals, serving fried combo platters, shrimp and crab-claw meat, and the like. Another casual option in this complex is **Rusty's Seafood & Oyster Bar,** with spicy seafood gumbo, raw or steamed oysters, burgers and sandwiches, pasta, and so on. The **Rusty's** location at 628 Glen Cheek Dr., Port Canaveral (✆ **321/783-2033;** www.rustysseafood.com), on the south side of Port Canaveral harbor, serves the same food, but with views of fishing boats and cruise ships heading in and out of the port. Bernard's main courses are $14 to $30; at the others, everything is about $5 to $22.

The **Mango Tree,** 118 N. Atlantic Ave./A1A, between North First and North Second streets (✆ **321/799-0513;** www.themangotreerestaurant.com), is the most beautiful and sophisticated restaurant in Cocoa Beach, serving gourmet seafood, pasta, chicken, and Continental dishes in a plantation-home atmosphere, amid grounds lush with tropical foliage. Main courses: $16 to $60.

In downtown Cocoa Beach, the **Heidelberg Restaurant,** 7 N. Orlando Ave./A1A, at the Minuteman Causeway (✆ **321/783-6806**), serves German and Continental dinners, such as beef stroganoff, goulash, roast duck, sauerbraten, and grilled loin pork chops. Main courses: $15 to $23. The adjoining **Heidi's Jazz Club** (✆ **321/783-4559;** www.heidisjazzclub.com) has music nightly except Mondays, with a jam session Sundays from 7 to 11pm. See the website for a schedule of performances.

The **Cocoa Beach Pier,** 401 Meade Ave., off the A1A, and a half mile north of S.R. 520 (✆ **321/783-7549;** www.cocoabeachpier.com), juts 800 feet over the Atlantic, providing a casual beer-and-fruity-drinks atmosphere, an open-air tiki bar with live music most nights, an ice-cream shop, sit-down seafood restaurants, and an arcade, plus beach-equipment rentals and volleyball right next door on the sand.

5 Charleston, South Carolina

In the closing pages of *Gone With the Wind,* Rhett tells Scarlett that he's going back home to Charleston, where he can find "the calm dignity life can have when it's lived by gentle folks, the genial grace of days that are gone." In spite of all the changes and upheavals over the years, Rhett's endorsement of Charleston still holds true, sans slavery and petticoats. Near-fanatical preservationists have assured that, architecturally at least, the Old South lives on here, and they've even managed to hold on to some of that famous graciousness, too. It's one of the best-preserved cities in the South, boasting 73 pre-Revolutionary buildings and more than 600 built before the 1840s. With cobblestone streets and horse-drawn carriages, stately old homes, and the scent of jasmine and wisteria in the air, it's a nice little time machine of a place, totally conscious of its history but gratifyingly averse to becoming an Old South theme park.

GETTING TO CHARLESTON & THE PORT

The **Port of Charleston**'s cruise ship terminal (✆ **843/958-8298;** www.port-of-charleston.com) is at 196 Concord St., at the foot of Market Street, smack in the heart of the historic district. You can easily walk anywhere you need to go. People

arrive by plane at **Charleston International Airport** (✆ **843/767-7009;** www.chs-airport.com), located in North Charleston, 12 miles from the terminal. If you've made arrangements for transfers through your cruise line, a representative will meet your arriving flight and direct you to shuttle buses. **Taxis** are available to downtown for about $27.

For those arriving by car, take I-95 north or south, then I-26 (SE) toward Charleston. Exit at East Bay Street, and turn left onto Market Street, then right on Washington. The entrance to the terminal will be on your left. Parking lots are near the terminal, with a shuttle service to take you to the pier. Parking is $16 per day.

GETTING AROUND You can easily walk around the historic district right from the cruise docks. Narrated horse-drawn **carriage tours** are available at Market Street from several operators. **Palmetto Carriage Tours** (✆ **843/723-8145;** www.carriagetour.com) uses mule teams and takes off from the red barn behind the Rainbow Market. Tickets are available at 40 N. Market St. From there, exit out back and through the parking lot to the barn. A 1-hour tour costs $20 for adults.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Historic Charleston Carriage Tour ($39, 1¼ hr.): As hokey as carriage tours may seem, this is actually a nice way to see historic Charleston. The leisurely ride just seems to match the pace of the place. You'll pass carefully restored 18th- and 19th-century homes and buildings as your guide gives some historical perspective.

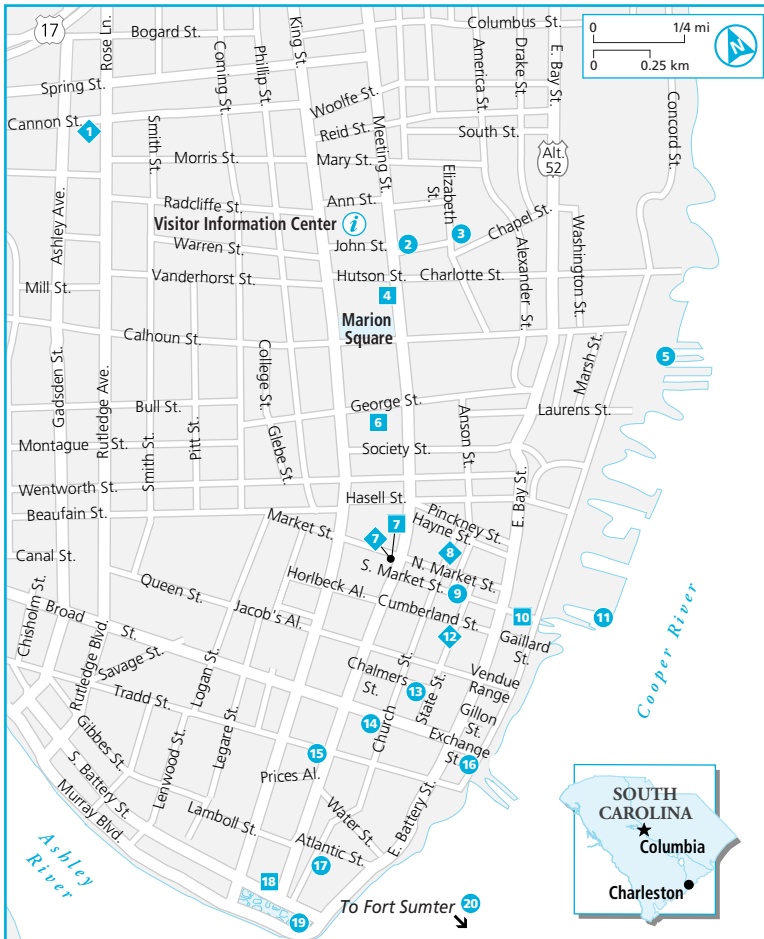
Boone Hall Plantation ($79, 3 hr.): See the historic Boone Hall Plantation, with its *Gone With the Wind* ambience. You can tour the lovely Georgian plantation house as well as the slave quarters, built from brick made on the plantation in the 1800s.

Historic Homes Walking Tour ($59, 2½ hr.): A narrated walking tour of Charleston's historic district, visiting the Nathaniel Russell House and the Edmondston-Alston House (see below) and passing the Old Exchange Building, St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Rainbow Row (the longest set of contiguous Georgian facades in the entire country), Catfish Row (a setting in *Porgy and Bess*), and the Calhoun Mansion.

Civil War History & H.L. Hunley Submarine ($79, 3 hr.): After touring Charleston's historic district, this tour visits the Warren Lasch Conservation Center, where the world's first "successful" submarine now resides in a conservation tank. Her moment in history was February 17, 1864, when she used a spar torpedo to sink the union warship *Housatonic* just outside Charleston Harbour. Her "success" is questionable—she sank immediately after the explosion, killing all her crew, and wasn't found again for 131 years—but her history is fascinating.

EXPLORING CHARLESTON ON YOUR OWN

Charleston's streets are laid out in an easy-to-follow grid. The main north-south thoroughfares are King, Meeting, and East Bay streets. Tradd, Broad, Queen, and Calhoun streets cross the city from east to west. South of Broad Street, East Bay becomes East Battery. The cruise terminal is located in the **Downtown** neighborhood, which extends north from Broad Street to Marion Square at the intersection of Calhoun and Meeting streets. You can't miss the **Old City Market** here (see "Shopping," below); it shoots straight at the terminal like an arrow. Meeting Street, Church Street, and all the other streets east to the waterfront are full of gorgeous homes and shady gardens, plus many of the historical attractions.



CRUISE TERMINAL 11

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Not far from the City Market, the **Old Exchange & Provost Dungeon,** 122 E. Bay St. (✆ **843/727-2165;** www.oldexchange.com), served as a prison during the American Revolution, then in 1873 became Charleston's City Hall. Its large collection of antique chairs was donated in 1921 by the local Daughters of the American Revolution, and its dungeon (which you tour with a costumed docent) displays the only visible chunk of Charleston's original city wall, the Half-Moon Bastion. We could do without its hokey animatronic displays, though. Admission is $7.

One block to the north, the **Old Slave Mart Museum,** 6 Chalmers St. (✆ **843/958-6467;** www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/charleston/osm.htm), is the only surviving slave market in South Carolina, dating from 1859. Its collection of artifacts, letters, oral histories, and video documents provides visitors a sense of the real people involved in the domestic slave trade—buyers, traders, and slaves. Admission is $7; closed Sunday.

The **Nathaniel Russell House,** 51 Meeting St. (✆ **843/724-8481;** www.historic charleston.org/experience/nrh), is one of the finest examples of Federal architecture you'll ever see. Built in 1808, it's noted for a "free flying" staircase, spiraling unsupported for three floors. The staircase's elliptical shape is repeated throughout the house. The interiors are ornate with period furnishings, especially the elegant music room with its golden harp and neoclassical-style sofa. Admission is $10. For a $16 combo ticket, you can also visit the **Aiken-Rhett House,** 48 Elizabeth St. (✆ **843/723-1159;** www.historiccharleston.org/experience/arh), built by merchant John Robinson in 1818, and then expanded by Governor and Mrs. William Aiken in the 1830s and 1850s. Like other Charlestonians of their time, the Aikens furnished their home with crystal and bronze chandeliers, classical sculpture, and paintings purchased on trips to Europe. Today, many of those objects are still in the rooms for which the Aikens bought them. Original outbuildings include the kitchens, slave quarters, stables, privies, and cattle sheds.

The **Charleston Museum,** 360 Meeting St. (✆ **843/722-2996;** www.charleston museum.org), was founded in 1773, making it the first and oldest museum in America. The collections preserve and interpret the social and natural history of Charleston and the South Carolina coastal region, with early crafts, historic relics, and a series of hands-on exhibits for children. Admission is $10. A $16 combination ticket also gets you admission to the **Joseph Manigault House,** 350 Meeting St. (across from the museum), a three-story Federal-style town house built in 1803 for its namesake, a French Huguenot plantation owner and politician. Many rooms have been restored to their original colors, with period furniture. Outbuildings such as the kitchen, slave quarters, stable, and privy are part of the experience. A $22 combo ticket also includes the museum's **Heyward-Washington House,** 87 Church St., built in 1772 by Daniel Heyward, the "rice king" of Charleston. It was also the home of Thomas Heyward, Jr., a signer of the Declaration of Independence. President George Washington bedded down here in 1791. Many of the fine period pieces in the house are the work of Thomas Elfe, one of America's most famous cabinetmakers. Admission to either house alone is $10.

At the southernmost point of the historic area stands the **Battery** (aka the White Point Gardens), where the Cooper and Ashley rivers converge. It has a landscaped park shaded by palmettos and live oaks, with walkways lined with monuments and other war relics. Virtually every home around here is of historic or architectural interest, including the **Edmondston-Alston House,** 21 E. Battery (✆ **843/722-7171;** www.middletonplace.org/default.asp?catID=4515), an 1825 house originally built in Federal style and later modified to a Greek Revival style. Inside are heirloom

furnishings, silver pieces, and paintings. Robert E. Lee once found refuge here when his hotel uptown caught fire. Admission is $10. The house is a property of the Middleton Place Foundation, which also operates the Middleton Place estate, 14 miles northwest of town.

Head back toward the cruise terminal along the seawall on East Battery and Murray Boulevard to absorb Charleston's riverfront ambience and catch the distant view of **Fort Sumter** (✆ **843/883-3123;** www.nps.gov/fosu), where the first shot of the Civil War was fired on April 12, 1861. Confederate forces launched a 34-hour bombardment of the fort, leading Union forces to surrender and the government in Washington to declare war. Amazingly, Confederate troops held onto Sumter for nearly 4 years, but by the end, continual bombardment from Union forces had reduced it to a heap of rubble. You can visit the fort with **Fort Sumter Tours/SpiritLine Cruises** (✆ **800/789-3678;** www.spiritlinecruises.com), which runs ferries from town to the fort. You can buy tickets at Liberty Square's Fort Sumter Visitor Education Center, near the foot of Calhoun Street. The 2¼-hour tour consists of approximately 1 hour at Fort Sumter plus a 30-minute harbor cruise in each direction. Park rangers are on hand at the fort to answer questions, and you can explore gun emplacements and visit a small museum filled with artifacts related to the siege. Ferry tickets cost $16; tours are offered two or three times a day, usually at 9:30am, noon, and 2:30pm, though there are seasonal variations. Call or check the website to confirm times.

SHOPPING

Located within sight of the cruise ship docks, the **Old City Market** comprises four open-sided buildings that run from East Bay Street up to Meeting Street. The market originally sold foodstuffs, including meat, fish, and local produce, but today it's packed with vendors hawking local art, food, books, clothing, and souvenirs. One standout item here: **sea-grass baskets** woven by Gullah women, descendents of coastal slaves who maintain a distinct culture on South Carolina's islands.

King Street is known for its shopping, with antiques at the south end of the street, clothes and jewelry along the main stretch, and housewares and interior decor along North King (aka Upper King).

If you fall for the period furniture you see in the historic houses, you can buy reproductions online from the **Historic Charleston Foundation** (www.historic charleston.org), which operates the Nathaniel Russell House, the Aiken-Rhett House, and several other historic properties.

WHERE TO STAY

There are quite a few distinctive accommodations in Charleston within spitting distance of the cruise pier.

The **Embassy Suites Historic Charleston,** 337 Meeting St. (✆ **843/723-6900;** www.embassysuites.com), is close to the visitor center, on Marion Square in the original home of the 19th-century Citadel Military College. It's listed on the National Register of Historic Places and has British West Indies colonial plantation decor and two-room suites. Rates: from $210.

Close to the dock, the **Market Pavilion,** 225 E. Bay St. (✆ **877/440-2250;** www.marketpavilion.com), has opulent old-Charleston-style guest rooms with old-world decor, plaster crown moldings, mahogany touches, and four-poster beds. There's also the wonderful rooftop Pavilion Bar and the excellent Grill 225 restaurant. Rates: from $229.

Barksdale House Inn, 27 George St. (✆ **888/577-4980;** www.barksdalehouse.com), is a neat, tidy, and well-proportioned Italianate building about ¼ mile north of the City Market, constructed as an inn in 1778 and later altered and enlarged. Many bedrooms have four-poster beds and working fireplaces—as if you need more heat in often-sweltering Charleston. Rates: from $119.

The **Planters Inn,** 112 N. Market St. (✆ **800/845-7082;** www.plantersinn.com), next to the City Market, is an opulent yet tasteful and cozy enclave of Colonial charm, and one of the finest small luxury hotels in the South. The spacious rooms have hardwood floors, marble bathrooms, and 18th-century decor. Afternoon tea is served in the lobby. The Peninsula Grill's setting has a 19th-century charm unlike any other restaurant in Charleston. The menu changes frequently, with main courses in the $25-to-$39 range. Rates: from $295.

Two Meeting Street Inn, 2 Meeting St. (✆ **843/723-7322;** www.twomeetingstreet.com), has the most enviable location in the city, right across from the Battery, looking over the confluence of the Charles and Ashley rivers. The house was built in 1892 as a wedding gift from a prosperous father to his daughter. Inside, the proportions are as lavish and gracious as the Gilded Age could provide. Rates: from $219.

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

Foodies flock to Charleston for refined Low Country cookery as well as an array of French and international specialties. Among the best is **Anson,** 12 Anson St., in the City Market area (✆ **843/577-0551;** www.ansonrestaurant.com), which blends the grace notes of a big New York restaurant with Low Country charm and cuisine. Its setting is a century-old, brick-sided ice warehouse, and the decor is full of Corinthian pilasters salvaged from demolished Colonial houses, with enough Victorian rococo for anyone's taste. Main courses: $19 to $31.

Nearby, **Hyman's Seafood Co.,** 215 Meeting St. (✆ **843/723-6000;** www.hymanseafood.com), occupies a location that's been in the same family since 1890, originating as a dry-goods business. Inside, multiple dining rooms and a takeout deli serve seafood platters and individual dishes, po'boy sandwiches, and more. Main courses: $10 to $36.

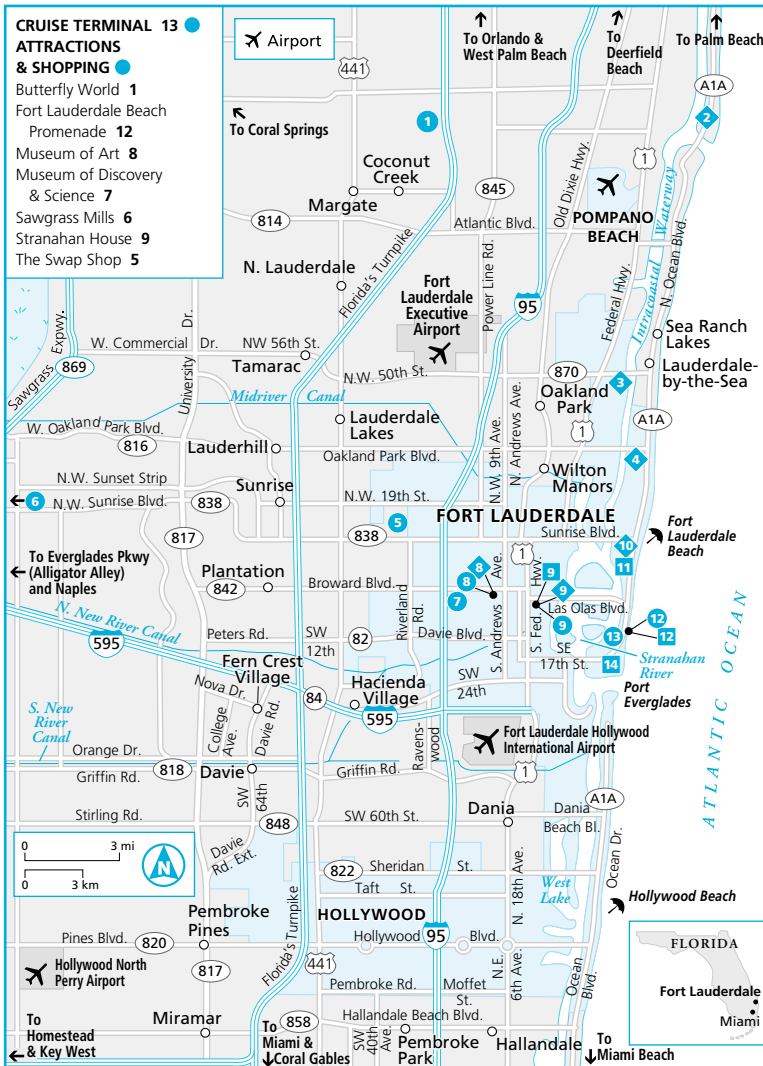
A. W. Shucks, 70 State St. (✆ **843/723-1151;** www.a-w-shucks.com), is a hearty, casual oyster bar in a restored warehouse next to City Market, around the corner from East Bay Street. Menu highlights are oysters and clams on the half shell, tasty seafood chowders, deviled crab, and a wide beer selection. Main courses: $14 to $24.

Farther from the market area, **Hominy Grill,** 207 Rutledge Ave. (✆ **843/937-0930;** www.hominygrill.com), serves simply and beautifully prepared dishes inspired by the kitchens of the Low Country. It has gained a devoted family following that comes here to feast on such specialties as oven-fried chicken with spicy peach gravy. From the market, head north on Meeting Street, turn left on Calhoun, and walk 7 blocks west to Rutledge. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served Monday through Friday and brunch Saturday and Sunday. Main courses: $10 to $19.

6 Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Broward County's Port Everglades is the second-busiest cruise port in the world, drawing more than 3.5 million cruise passengers a year. It boasts the deepest harbor on the Eastern seaboard south of Norfolk, 12 ultramodern cruise ship terminals, and an easy access route to the Fort Lauderdale–Hollywood International Airport, less than a 10-minute drive away.

Fort Lauderdale



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GETTING TO FORT LAUDERDALE & THE PORT

Port Everglades (✆ **954/523-3404;** www.broward.org/port) is about 23 miles north of Miami within the city boundaries of Fort Lauderdale, Hollywood, and Dania Beach. I-595 will take you right onto the grounds. If you're coming by air, you'll land at the **Fort Lauderdale–Hollywood International Airport** (✆ **954/359-6100**), less than 2 miles from Port Everglades (5 min. by bus or taxi), making this the easiest airport-to-cruise-port trip in Florida. If you've booked air or transfers through the cruise line, a representative will take you to your shuttle after landing. If you haven't, taking a **taxi** to the port costs less than $10.

If you're driving, the port has three passenger entrances: Spangler Boulevard, an extension of S.R. 84 East; Eisenhower Boulevard, running south from the 17th Street Causeway/A1A; and Eller Drive, connecting directly with I-595. I-595 runs east-west, with connections to the Fort Lauderdale–Hollywood Airport, I-95, S.R. 7 (441), Florida Turnpike, Sawgrass Expressway, and I-75. Parking is available in two large garages for $12 a day.

GETTING AROUND For a taxi, call **Yellow Cab** (✆ **954/565-5400**). Rates start at $4.50 for the first mile and are $2.40 for each additional mile. **Broward County Mass Transit** (✆ **954/357-8400**) runs bus service throughout the county; 1-day passes are $2.50. **Water Taxi** (✆ **954/467-6677;** www.watertaxi.com) sails between Oakland Park Boulevard and Southeast 17th Street along the Intracoastal Waterway, and west along the New River into downtown Fort Lauderdale. All-day passes are $13, and you can hop on and off at will. If you want to go to South Beach in Miami, it's $24.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Everglades Airboat Ride ($39, 2½ hr.): The Seminole Indians called it Pahay Okee, the "grassy water," and on this 30-minute airboat ride, you'll get to see some of the area's indigenous wildlife, including water birds and American alligators.

EXPLORING FORT LAUDERDALE ON YOUR OWN

Fort Lauderdale Beach, a 5-mile strip along S.R. A1A, gained fame in the 1950s as a spring-break playground, popularized by the movie *Where the Boys Are,* but today the scene is a lot more affluent and family-oriented. In addition to the beaches (see below), there are a few other attractions that might float your boat.

The **Museum of Discovery & Science,** 401 S.W. Second St. (✆ **954/467-6637;** www.mods.org), is an excellent interactive science museum with an IMAX theater. "Florida Ecoscapes" is particularly interesting, with a living coral reef, bees, bats, frogs, turtles, and alligators. Admission is $10 without IMAX film, $15 for museum and one film. The **Museum of Art,** 1 E. Las Olas Blvd. (✆ **954/525-5500;** www.moafl.org), is a truly terrific small museum whose permanent collection of 20th-century European and American art includes works by Picasso, Calder, Warhol, Mapplethorpe, Dalí, Frank Stella, and William Glackens. African, South Pacific, pre-Columbian, Native-American, and Cuban art are also on display. Admission is about $10, but varies by exhibition.

Stranahan House, 335 S.E. Sixth Ave. (✆ **954/524-4736;** www.stranahanhouse.org), is Fort Lauderdale's oldest standing structure and a prime example of classic "Florida Frontier" architecture. Built in 1901 by the "father of Fort Lauderdale," Frank Stranahan, it's been a post office, town hall, and general store, and now serves as a worthwhile little museum of South Florida pioneer life. Admission is $12; closed Monday and Tuesday.

In the walk-through, screened-in aviary at **Butterfly World,** Tradewinds Park South, 3600 W. Sample Rd., Coconut Creek, west of the Florida Turnpike (✆ **954/977-4400;** www.butterflyworld.com), visitors can watch newly hatched butterflies emerge from cocoons and flutter around as they learn to fly. There are more than 150 species in residence. Admission is $20.

BEACHES

Backed by an endless row of hotels and popular with visitors and locals alike, the **Fort Lauderdale Beach Promenade** is set along A1A, also known as Fort Lauderdale Beach Boulevard, between S.E. 17th Street and Sunrise Boulevard. The fabled strip from *Where the Boys Are* is Ocean Boulevard, between Las Olas and Sunrise boulevards. On weekends, parking spots at the oceanside meters are difficult to find. **Fort Lauderdale Beach** at the Howard Johnson is another perennial local favorite. A jetty bounds the beach on the south side, making it rather private, although the water gets a little choppy. High school and college students share this area with an older crowd. One of the main beach entrances is at 4660 N. Ocean Dr. in Lauderdale-by-the-Sea.

SHOPPING

If you're looking for unusual boutiques and art galleries, head to quaint **Las Olas Boulevard,** located west of A1A and a block east of Federal Highway/U.S. 1 (off S.E. 8th St.), where hundreds of shops have alluring window decorations like kitchen utensils posing as modern-art sculptures. **Las Olas Riverfront,** at S.W. First Avenue and Las Olas Boulevard (✆ **954/522-6556;** www.riverfrontfl.com), is a huge retail complex with restaurants, clothing stores, arcades, and a multiplex movie theater.

The **Swap Shop,** 3291 W. Sunrise Blvd. (✆ **954/791-SWAP** [791-7927]; www.floridaswapshop.com), is one of the world's largest flea markets. In addition to endless acres of vendors, there's a mini–amusement park and a 15-screen drive-in movie theater. It's open daily. About 10 miles outside town, **Sawgrass Mills,** 12801 W. Sunrise Blvd., at Flamingo Road (✆ **954/846-2300;** www.sawgrassmillsmall.com), is one of the premier outlet malls in the country, with more than 300 shops, kiosks, a 24-screen movie theater, and many restaurants and bars.

WHERE TO STAY

Fort Lauderdale Beach has a hotel or motel on nearly every block, and the selection ranges from run-down to luxurious.

The **Hyatt Regency Pier 66,** located close to the port at 2301 S.E. 17th St. Causeway (✆ **800/233-1234** or 954/525-6666; www.pier66.hyatt.com), is a circular landmark whose large rooms are decorated with a retro modern look. Its famous revolving rooftop bar, the Piertop Lounge, is often filled with cruise ship patrons. A $25-million refurbishment has transformed the lobby, lawn, and remaining guest rooms with a retro-modern decor. Rates: from $169.

The **Harbor Beach Marriott Resort & Spa,** just south of Fort Lauderdale's strip at 3030 Holiday Dr. (✆ **800/222-6543** or 954/525-4000; www.marriottharbor beach.com), is set on 16 acres of beachfront property. All rooms open onto private balconies overlooking either the ocean or the Intracoastal Waterway. Facilities include two excellent restaurants and a 24,000-square-foot European spa. Rates: from $269.

Open since 1936, the **Riverside Hotel,** 620 E. Las Olas Blvd. (✆ **800/325-3280;** www.riversidehotel.com), is a charming six-story lodging set on the sleepy and scenic New River, capturing the essence of Old Florida. Guest rooms, outfitted in Mexican

tile and wicker furnishings, are spacious and well maintained. Try for one of the ground-floor units, which have higher ceilings and more space. Rates: from $139.

Located on its own little island between Lake Mayan and the Atlantic, the **Lago Mar Resort and Club,** 1700 S. Ocean Lane (✆ **800/524-6627** or 954/523-6511; www.lagomar.com), is an utterly inviting, casually elegant yet family-friendly slice of Old Florida. Rooms and suites have Mediterranean or Key West influences, and guests have access to the broadest and best strip of beach in the entire city, not to mention a wonderful bougainvillea-lined, 9,000-square-foot swimming lagoon. A new six-story wing of one- and two-bedroom oceanfront suites with balconies and big, luxurious bathrooms includes a deck of native tropical landscaping and a 5,000-square-foot saltwater lagoon. Rates: from $175.

The **Pillars Hotel,** 111 N. Birch Rd. (✆ **800/800-7666;** www.pillarshotel.com), is the quintessential Fort Lauderdale retreat, its two-story, 23-room structure done up in British colonial/Caribbean style, with luxurious rooms, lush landscaping, and white-tablecloth room service. This is the best hotel of its size in the region. Rates: from $195.

For something modern, try the **Atlantic,** 601 N. Fort Lauderdale Beach Blvd. (✆ **800/325-3589** or 954/567-8020; www.starwoodhotels.com), a Starwood Luxury Collection property that sits on a stunning white-sand beach. Decor is a study in minimal modernity—soothing, comfortable, and stylish. Rates: from $219.

The **Ritz-Carlton Fort Lauderdale** (formerly the St. Regis), 1 N. Fort Lauderdale Beach Blvd. (✆ **800/325-3589** or 954/465-2300; www.ritzcarlton.com), is the first and only five-star hotel on Fort Lauderdale Beach, elevating the strip to an entirely new level of luxury. The 183 rooms all have views of the Atlantic or the Intracoastal Waterway. Rates: from $269.

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

Las Olas Boulevard is the hub for restaurants in Fort Lauderdale. Look here for **Johnny V,** 625 E. Las Olas Blvd. (✆ **954/761-7920;** www.johnnyvlasolas.com), the domain of chef Johnny Vinczenz, who cooks up Caribbean-influenced new-Floridian cuisine (think smoked-pheasant nachos or sage-grilled Florida dolphin with lobster pan gravy served atop rock-shrimp plantain stuffing with cranberry-mango chutney) for the famous and not-so-famous. Main courses: $19 to $38.

For something more classic, **Cap's Place,** 2765 NE 28th Court (✆ **954/941-0418;** www.capsplace.com), is a famous old-time seafood joint, serving good food at reasonable prices. The restaurant is on a peninsula; you get a ferry ride over (see its website for directions). Mahimahi and snapper are popular and, like the other meat and pasta dishes here, can be prepared any way you want. Main courses: $14 to $28. **Tarpon Bend,** 200 S.W. Second St. (✆ **954/523-3233**), is one of the few places where the fishermen still bring the fish to the back door. The oysters from the raw bar are shucked to order, and the steamed clambake (with half a Maine lobster, clams, potatoes, mussels, and corn on the cob) is scrumptious and served in its own pot. Main courses: $9 to $17.

Head north for ethnic cuisine. **Café Martorano,** 3343 E. Oakland Park Blvd. (✆ **954/561-2554;** www.cafemartorano.com), is like a big, fat, Italian wedding, where eating, drinking, and dancing are paramount. The menu changes daily, and because reservations aren't accepted, the wait can be up to 2 hours for a table. Main courses: $15 to $45. A little farther north, **Eduardo De San Angel,** 2822 E. Commercial Blvd. (✆ **954/772-4731;** www.eduardodesanangel.com), serves gourmet

Mexican cuisine in a room that resembles an intimate hacienda, adorned with fresh flowers and candlelight. Main courses: $26 to $38. Closed Sunday.

For pre-cruise imbibing, the **Parrot,** 911 Sunrise Lane (✆ **954/563-1493;** www.parrotlounge.com), is Fort Lauderdale's most famous dive bar, a local's and out-of-towner's choice for an evening of beer (16 kinds on tap) and bonding.

7 Galveston, Texas

Some 50 miles south of Houston, Galveston is on a 30-mile-long barrier island averaging only 2 miles wide. Ships departing from here can reach the open sea in about 30 minutes, compared to several hours of lag time from the Port of Houston. The city's main attractions are the downtown historic district; the Strand, with its Victorian commercial buildings and houses; and the beaches, which draw crowds of Houstonians and other Texans during the summer.

At the end of the 19th century, Galveston was the largest city in Texas and the third-busiest port in the country. But then, on September 8, 1900, a massive storm came ashore, carrying with it 140-mph winds and a 20-foot surge that washed completely over the island. Houses were smashed into matchwood, and more than 6,000 islanders—a sixth of the island's population—were drowned. Those who remained went to work to prevent a recurrence of the disaster, raising the city's ground level by up to 17 feet and erecting a stout seawall that now stretches along 10 miles of shoreline, with several jetties of large granite blocks projecting out into the water.

These defenses protected much of the island when **Hurricane Ike** came ashore in the early morning hours of September 13, 2008, but two factors made the destruction worse than it would ordinarily have been: First, Ike packed a bigger storm surge (14 ft.) than a normal category-2 hurricane; second, it hit at precisely the wrong spot, in effect outflanking Galveston's seawall to the east and pushing water into the bay, which then flooded Galveston's most vulnerable, low-lying areas. Most of the damage in the city—including that to the Strand and the East End Historic District—was the result of flooding. There was a lot of wind and water damage to beach houses beyond the seawall on the west side of the island, and to the east of the island, especially Bolivar Peninsula.

Many of Galveston's historical houses remain closed and shuttered, awaiting federal aid, insurance, or other funding. At this writing, 5 months after the hurricane, 60% of the stores in the Strand have reopened. The city has already removed the debris from its principal beaches and replenished the sand. At present it is making repairs to the seawall and performing basic work on infrastructure. For the first few months after Ike, cruise ships removed to Houston, but they're back now, and the major hotels have reopened. Despite the difficulties, the city is already back to celebrating Mardi Gras and "Dickens on the Strand," its annual Victorian Christmas festival, but both were a shadow of their former selves, and it will be at least another year before the city returns to normal.

GETTING TO GALVESTON & THE PORT

The **Texas Cruise Ship Terminal** at the Port of Galveston (✆ **409/766-6113;** www.portofgalveston.com) is at Harborside Drive and 25th Street, on Galveston Island. It's reached via I-45 south from Houston. If you're flying in, you'll land at one of two Houston airports: **William P. Hobby Airport** (south of downtown Houston, and about 31 miles, or a 45-min. drive, from the terminal) or the larger **George Bush**

Intercontinental Airport (north of downtown Houston, and about 54 miles, or an 80-min. drive, from the terminal). Information on both is available at **www.fly2houston.com**. Because it's a long way from both airports to the cruise ship terminal (and because taxi prices are correspondingly high), it's a good idea to arrange transfers through your cruise line. You can also call **Airport Shuttle America** (✆ **281/530-4000** or 713/270-4200; www.airportshuttleamerica.net). It transports cruise ship passengers from either of Houston's airports to Galveston. From Hobby Airport, the fare is $30 per person; from Bush, it's $35. **Taxis** cost about $65 from Hobby Airport and $105 from Bush. Fuel surcharges are added when the price of gas goes above $3 per gallon.

If you're driving to the port, I-45 is the main artery for those arriving from the north. To get to the terminal, follow I-45 south to exit 1C (at Harborside Dr./Hwy. 275); it's the first exit after the causeway. Turn left (east) onto Harborside Drive and continue for about 5 miles to the cruise terminal. Long-term parking at the port is available. The lots are a half mile from the cruise ship terminal; shuttle buses transport passengers between the lots and the terminal, where porters are available to carry luggage. Parking costs about $10 per day for an uncovered lot and about $12 per day for a covered lot, but is available only for those taking 7-day cruises.

GETTING AROUND Within walking distance of the port's two terminals is the historic **Strand District,** Galveston's revitalized downtown, with shops, art galleries, museums, and eateries lining its quaint brick streets. Most of Galveston's hotels, motels, and restaurants are located along the seawall from where Broadway meets the shore all the way west past 60th Street. At present, service on the **Galveston Island Rail Trolley** (✆ **409/797-3900;** www.islandtransit.net) remains suspended owing to heavy damage to the line from Hurricane Ike. No date has been set for its return to operation.

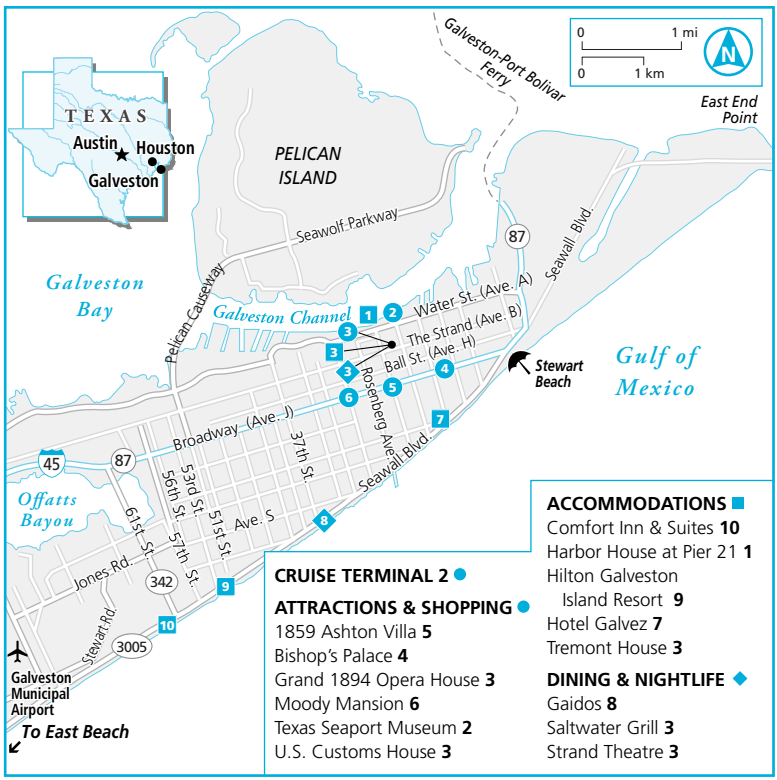
BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

City Tour ($47, 3½ hr.): For guests with late-departing flights, this bus tour passes through Galveston's scenic and historic Strand District. It then travels to Houston, touring the downtown theater and museum districts; Hermann Park, home to the Houston Zoo; and River Oaks, Houston's most prestigious residential neighborhood, before ending at Bush airport.

EXPLORING GALVESTON ON YOUR OWN

If you've got only a few hours before you have to board your cruise, focus on the Strand National Historic Landmark District, the heart of Galveston in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and the East End Historic District, both located north of Broadway.

The **Strand District** is the restored commercial district that runs from 19th to 25th streets between Church Street and the harbor piers. When cotton was king, the Strand was dubbed the "Wall Street of the Southwest." Today, its three- and four-story Victorian iron-fronts (so named because of their ironwork facades) are full of shopping and dining options. Near the cruise dock, at Pier 21, the **Texas Seaport Museum** (✆ **409/763-1877;** www.tsm-elissa.org) is centered around the three-masted, iron-hulled sailing ship *Elissa,* built in 1877 in Aberdeen, Scotland, and still fully functional today. You can also browse a computer database listing the names of 133,000 immigrants who first entered the U.S. through Galveston in the 19th and early–20th centuries. Admission is $8 for adults, $6 for children 7 to 17.



The **East End Historic District** is the old silk-stocking neighborhood that runs from 9th to 19th streets between Broadway and Church Street. It has many lovely houses that have been completely restored. The **Galveston Historical Foundation** (www.galvestonhistory.org) has regular tours of several properties, including ornate Victorian **Bishop's Palace,** 1402 Broadway (✆ **409/762-2475**), Galveston's grandest and best-known historic building, built between 1887 and 1893. Others among its properties, including Galveston's first great Broadway mansion, the **1859 Ashton Villa,** 2328 Broadway (✆ **409/762-3933**), sustained heavy storm damage in 2008 and are still closed to visitors. Other mansions-turned-museums include the **Moody Mansion,** 2618 Broadway (✆ **409/762-7668;** www.moodymansion.org), whose ornately furnished rooms depict the home life of the wealthy Moody family, who built the house in 1895. Admission to Bishop's Palace is $10 for adults; admission to the Moody Mansion is $7.

Elsewhere in town, Postoffice Street is a restored historic district with more than 25 buildings, including the **Grand 1894 Opera House,** still in operation, and the **U.S. Customs House,** now home of the Galveston Historical Foundation.

BEACHES

The beaches are another of Galveston's most popular attractions, with light-tan sand and warm waters much of the year. **East Beach** and **Stewart Beach,** operated by the city, have pavilions with dressing rooms, showers, and restrooms, ideal for day-trippers. These beaches have already been restored, but other beaches on the west side of the island suffered noticeable erosion and haven't yet been cleared of debris. Stewart Beach is at the end of Broadway, while East Beach is about a mile farther east. All of the beaches are free. Another activity popular with visitors and locals alike is walking, skating, or riding a bike atop the **seawall,** which extends 10 miles along the shoreline.

SHOPPING

Galveston has more than 20 art galleries on the Strand, Pier 21, and in the Postoffice Street Entertainment District. The Strand is also known for its quaint antiques, art, and memorabilia shops.

WHERE TO STAY

The **Tremont House,** 2300 Ship's Mechanic Row (✆ **800/WYNDHAM** [996-3426] or 409/763-0300; www.wyndham.com), is a 117-room gem in the heart of the Strand neighborhood. A replica of the original hotel built in 1839, which stood nearby, this Tremont occupies the Leon & H. Blum Building built in 1879, and has been designed to re-create the atmosphere of its 19th-century namesake. Rates: from $120.

Harbor House at Pier 21, No. 28–Pier 21 (✆ **800/874-3721** or 409/763-3321; www.harborhousepier21.com), is a 42-unit hotel built on a pier and overlooking the harbor. It has modern styling and is very close to the Strand District and many restaurants. Rates: from $89.

Hotel Galvez, 2024 Seawall Blvd. (✆ **800/WYNDHAM** [996-3426] or 409/765-7721; www.wyndham.com), Galveston's historic grand hotel, is located on the shore facing the seawall and one of the municipal beaches. It has 231 rooms and is on the trolley line leading to the Strand District. Rates: from $115.

Other properties on Seawall Boulevard include the 149-unit **Hilton Galveston Island Resort,** 5400 Seawall Blvd. (✆ **800/HILTONS** [445-8667] or 409/744-5000; www.hilton.com; rates: from $129), and the 100-unit **Comfort Inn & Suites,** 6302 Seawall Blvd. (✆ **800/221-2222;** www.comfortinn.com; rates: from $110).

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

Seafood is what people come to Galveston for, and there's quite a variety. **Gaidos,** 3800 Seawall Blvd. (✆ **409/762-9625;** www.gaidosofgalveston.com), is a Galveston favorite that's been owned and operated by the Gaido family for four generations, with fresh seafood and attentive service. The soups and side dishes are mostly traditional Southern and Gulf Coast recipes that are comfort food for longtime customers. The stuffed snapper is the best we've had. Main courses: $15 to $33. **Saltwater Grill,** 2017 Postoffice St. (✆ **409/762-3474**), set in an old building near the Strand, prints a daily menu that usually includes some inventive seafood pastas, a fish dish with an Asian bent, gumbo or bouillabaisse, and a few nonseafood options. Main courses: $14 to $29.

There are enough bars and restaurants along the seawall and in the historic Strand and Postoffice Street districts to pleasantly while away an evening. For concerts, musicals, and plays, check out the 200-seat **Strand Theatre,** 2317 Ship's Mechanic Row (✆ **877/787-2639;** www.strandtheatregalveston.org), in the heart of the historic district, or the

elegant **Grand 1894 Opera House,** 2020 Postoffice St. (✆ **800/821-1894;** www.thegrand.com), for Broadway productions, orchestral performances, country music, and more.

8 Los Angeles, California

L.A. isn't a city or even a county; it's a whole planet unto itself, its nation-states linked by dozens of superhighways that turn into slow-motion performance art at rush hour. The place is just as sunny, smoggy, rich, poor, sybaritic, hard-boiled, movie-happy, New Agey, and unreal as the movies make it seem, and so obsessively catalogued by those same movies that you'll be experiencing déjà vu every other minute of your visit, spotting places you've seen on the silver screen. We had an argument with a friend once about which U.S. city would be most recognizable to anybody, anywhere in the world. We said New York, she said L.A., and while we still stick with our opinion, we have to admit she had a point.

Now here's the downside to L.A.'s abundance: Unless you stay for several weeks, you won't have a hope in hell of getting a real handle on the place. It's just too big, too diverse, and takes a much bigger guidebook to cover—one like *Frommer's Los Angeles,* for instance (hint, hint).

GETTING TO L.A. & THE PORT

There are two major cruise centers in L.A.: the **World Cruise Center,** off Harbor Boulevard in San Pedro (✆ **310/SEA-PORT** [732-7678]; www.portoflosangeles.org), and Carnival Corporation's **Long Beach Cruise Terminal,** 10 miles west at 231 Windsor Way, Long Beach (www.sanpedro.com/spcom/crusshp2.htm). The World Cruise Center is the busier of the two, hosting Carnival, Celebrity, Costa, Crystal, Cunard, Disney, HAL, NCL, Princess, Radisson, Royal Caribbean, Seabourn, Silversea, and Windstar. The Long Beach terminal is pretty much all Carnival, all the time, though Princess also docks here on occasion.

Most visitors fly into **Los Angeles International Airport** (✆ **310/646-5252;** www.lawa.org/welcomelax.aspx), better known as LAX. This behemoth is situated oceanside, between Marina del Rey and Manhattan Beach, about 18 miles north of the World Cruise Center. You may also opt to fly into **Long Beach Municipal Airport,** 4100 Donald Douglas Dr. (✆ **562/570-2600;** www.lgb.org), if you're heading right to the port and don't intend to stay on after. (JetBlue offers excellent fares to Long Beach.) To get to the World Cruise Center from LAX, drive south on I-405, then south on I-110. Exit at Harbor Boulevard, go straight through the intersection, and right into the World Cruise Center. To get to the Long Beach Terminal, take I-405 south to I-710 south and continue till you see signs for the *Queen Mary* (that's the old, original *Queen Mary*—see "Exploring L.A. on Your Own," below). At the *Queen Mary* entrance, stay to the far right of the parking ticket taker and follow the signs. Parking is $12 per day at both cruise terminals.

GETTING AROUND Even though L.A. has been steadily building its public-transportation infrastructure, getting around without a car is still like trying to see Mars without a spacesuit. All the major **car-rental** companies are represented at the airports, but if you want to look like a star on the freeways, you can rent a Porsche, BMW, Mercedes, Lexus, or Hummer at **Budget Beverly Hills Car Collection,** 9815 Wilshire Blvd. (✆ **800/227-7117** or 310/274-9174; www.budgetbeverlyhills.com).

For even more spiff, **Beverly Hills Rent-A-Car,** 9732 Little Santa Monica Blvd., Beverly Hills (✆ **800/479-5996** or 310/337-1400; www.bhrentacar.com), offers cars from Lamborghini, Maserati, Ferrari, Rolls, and Bentley, plus classic Caddies from the '50s, '60s, and '70s, as well as three different hybrids (for those with a heavy conscience). Both companies offer airport pickup service and complimentary delivery to local hotels.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Universal Studios Tour ($80, 7 hr.): A bus ride takes you to huge Universal Studios, where you board the "Glamour Tram" for a backstage look at the movie biz (see description under "Exploring L.A. on Your Own," below).

EXPLORING L.A. ON YOUR OWN

Los Angeles is a very confusing city in that its "downtown" isn't considered the center of the city. In fact, there really *is* no center—just a whole bunch of neighborhoods and independently incorporated communities that run into one another and spread out as far as the eye can see. The best way to grasp the geography is to break it into six regions, roughly west to east: **Santa Monica** and the beach communities, **L.A.'s Westside** and **Beverly Hills, Hollywood** and **West Hollywood, downtown,** the **San Fernando Valley,** and **Pasadena** and environs. You'll probably concentrate your visit in the city's western districts, because that's where the majority of tourist attractions, restaurants, and shops are. Despite the opening of the Disney Concert Hall and the Staples Center (a major sports and entertainment arena), most short-stay visitors never make it as far east as downtown.

There are so many things to see and do in this town that most *residents* never see and do them all, so in this section we'll be concentrating on the quintessential L.A. experience of taking a big swan dive into pop culture and swimming around.

Begin your adventure on Hollywood Boulevard at the **Hollywood Walk of Fame,** between Gower and La Brea (and also Vine St. between Yucca and Sunset Blvd.). Currently more than 2,200 past and present celebrities have bronze medallions on the world's most famous sidewalk, each one set in the center of a terrazzo star. You'll need a history book for some of them (who's Blanche Thebom again?), but you'll be surprised by how many will pop your brain buttons. A complete list of stars and their addresses is available online at **www.hollywoodchamber.net**. This part of Hollywood is a funky mix of touristy shops and businesses catering to the local rocker and biker culture. And then, of course, there are the **Scientologists,** who own a lot of the local real estate.

At the corner of Hollywood Boulevard and Highland Street, the massive 83/4-acre **Hollywood & Highland** entertainment complex (✆ **323/464-6412;** www.hollywoodandhighland.com) has all the top-end merchants as well as studio broadcast facilities, restaurants, nightclubs, cinemas, the Lucky Strike Lanes "upscale bowling alley/lounge," a hotel (see "Where to Stay," later in this section), and the **Kodak Theatre,** home of the Academy Awards. The mall's other centerpiece is the open-air **Babylon Court,** designed after a set from the 1916 film *Intolerance,* with giant elephant-topped pillars and a colossal arch that frames the **Hollywood sign** in the distance, up on Mount Lee. (Trivia: The sign started as an advertisement for the "Hollywoodland" housing development. It was only later that it lost the "land" and was adopted as the symbol of the movie industry.)

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Between Highland and La Brea Avenue is the famed **Grauman's Chinese Theatre,** 6925 Hollywood Blvd. (✆ **323/464-8111;** www.manntheatres.com/chinese), one of the world's great movie palaces, opened in 1927 by impresario Sid Grauman. Visitors by the millions flock to the theater for its famous entry court, where stars such as Gary Cooper, Elizabeth Taylor, Ginger Rogers, and more than 160 others set their signatures and handprints/footprints in concrete.

From Hollywood, you're in an ideal position to set off on a drive along **Sunset Boulevard**—the street, the myth, the legend. This is a must for first-time visitors because you'll see a cross-section of everything that is L.A.: legendary clubs, studios, hotels, and zip codes that you'll instantly recognize from movies and television. The 45-minute drive takes you from Hollywood's seedy/starry streets to flamboyant **West Hollywood,** past glittering **Beverly Hills,** through **Brentwood** (O.J.'s old neighborhood), into the secluded enclave of **Pacific Palisades,** and finally to the sea. From there, you can head north to Malibu's fabled beaches (land of *Baywatch*) or head south along the coast to the funkier beach town of **Santa Monica.** Park at the **Santa Monica Pier** and head south on foot toward **Venice Beach** along the carnival-like **Ocean Front Walk.** You haven't visited L.A. properly until you've toured the area on the right kind of wheels (in-line skates), taken in the human carnival around you, noshed on boardwalk food, watched a few street performers, and bought some cheap sunglasses or ethnic garb—all while enjoying the blue sea, the wide beach, and the world's vainest weight lifters, who pump themselves up at an outdoor gym right in the heart of things.

Venice is street theater, but for some of the big-budget kind, you'll want to tour one of the movie studios. **Warner Brothers Studios,** 3400 Riverside Dr., Burbank (✆ **818/972-TOUR** [972-8687]; www.wbstudiotour.com), has the most comprehensive tour, taking visitors on a 2¼-hour drive-and-walk around the studio's faux streets. After a brief introductory film, you'll pile into glorified golf carts and cruise past parking spaces marked with stars' names, then walk through active film and television sets, where you'll get a glimpse of how the biz really works. Sometimes you can also visit working sets to watch actors filming. Reservations are required, and children 7 and under are not admitted. Bring valid photo ID. Tours are $45 per person, departing every 30 minutes on weekdays (8:20am–4pm, with extended hours in spring and summer).

In nearby Griffith Park, the bronze domes of **Griffith Observatory,** 2800 E. Observatory Rd. (✆ **213/473-0800;** www.griffithobservatory.org), have been Hollywood Hills landmarks since 1935. The observatory features 60 space-related exhibits and a 300-seat planetarium that hosts hourly screenings of a narrated half-hour projection show. Outside, the grounds allow unparalleled city views. Observatory admission is free, but the planetarium show costs $7 adults, $3 kids; closed Monday.

The "other" studio tour is at **Universal Studios Hollywood,** Hollywood Freeway (Universal Center Dr. or Lankershim Blvd. exits), Universal City, in the San Fernando Valley (✆ **800/UNIVERSAL** [864-8377] or 818/622-3801; www.universalstudioshollywood.com), but this isn't just a working studio; it's also one of the world's largest amusement parks. The main attraction continues to be the Studio Tour, a 1-hour guided tram ride around the company's 420 acres, passing stars' dressing rooms and visiting famous back-lot sets. The rest of the experience is thrill rides themed on blockbusters such as *The Mummy, Jurassic Park,* and *Shrek.* Admission is $67. Hours vary, so check before you go.

Culture? You Want Culture?

If you have any energy left after being a shameless L.A. tourist, pay a visit to the **Getty Center,** 1200 Getty Center Dr. (✆ **310/440-7300;** www.getty.edu), the Richard Meier–designed cultural cornerstone that displays J. Paul Getty's enormous collection of art, ranging from antiquities to Impressionist painters, contemporary photography, and graphic arts. Admission is free, but you have to pay and make a reservation to park your car, which is *so* L.A. For more culture, there's also **Museum Row,** a stretch of Wilshire Boulevard just east of Beverly Hills that's home to about a dozen different institutions, from the **Los Angeles County Museum of Art,** 5905 Wilshire Blvd. (✆ **323/857-6000;** www.lacma.org), to the **La Brea Tar Pits** and **George C. Page Museum of La Brea Discoveries,** 5801 Wilshire Blvd. (✆ **323/934-PAGE** [934-7243]; www.tarpits.org).

Up in Malibu, a mile north of Sunset Blvd., the **Getty Villa Malibu,** 17985 Pacific Coast Hwy. (✆ **310/440-7300;** www.getty.edu), is the former residence of oil tycoon J. Paul Getty, built in 1974 and modeled after a first-century Roman country house. The museum holds a permanent collection of more than 1,200 Greek, Roman, and Etruscan artifacts dating from 6,500 B.C. to A.D. 400, augmented by various temporary exhibitions. In addition to art, it has dazzling ocean views. Admission is free, but advance, timed tickets are required (see website). Parking is $10. Closed Tuesday and Wednesday.

Just outside the gate is **Universal CityWalk** (✆ **818/622-4455;** www.citywalkhollywood.com), a 3-block-long pedestrian promenade crammed with flashy name-brand stores, themed nightclubs, theme restaurants (the Hard Rock Cafe and others), a 3-D IMAX theater, an 18-screen cinema, NASCAR virtual racing, and more, More, MORE! Getting in is free, but after that you're on your own. It's open from 11am to 9pm Sunday through Thursday, 11am to 11pm Friday and Saturday.

Now, lest we forget, **Disneyland** is also not so far away, at 1313 Harbor Blvd. in Anaheim, an hour south of downtown L.A. on the I-5 (✆ **714/781-4565;** www.disneyland.com). The complex is divided into several themed "lands," ranging from the archetypal Main Street U.S.A. to Adventureland, inspired by Asia, Africa, and South America. For our money, no ride in the park (or in its Florida cousin, for that matter) has ever topped **"it's a small world,"** a slow-moving indoor river ride in which creepy dolls of all the world's children sing their saccharine song through hinged mouths. When it was built in the '50s, could Walt Disney have known that he was creating a preview of every bad acid trip that happened in the '60s? It's a classic. Admission to the park costs $69 for ages 10 and up, $59 for ages 3 to 9. Multiday passes are also available, as are resort accommodations.

For cruise travelers with a sense of history, one of the most vital attractions in all L.A. has to be the **RMS *Queen Mary,*** 1126 Queen's Hwy. in Long Beach, at the end of I-710 (✆ **562/435-3511;** www.queenmary.com). One of the greatest ocean liners ever, she's now moored permanently in Long Beach, in the same complex that holds Carnival's Long Beach terminal. Though many of her original furnishings are long

gone, she's still the only surviving example of this particular kind of 20th-century elegance, from her staterooms' tropical-hardwood paneling to the incredible Deco artwork and miles of Bakelite handrails. Stroll the teakwood decks and, with just a little imagination, you're back in 1936. Admission is $25 adults, $13 kids; open daily. The *Queen Mary* also functions as a hotel, with rates starting at $149. Several onboard restaurants serve brunches and dinners at various rates, and packages are available that include special exhibits, guided tours, and the Soviet submarine moored next door.

Just across the harbor is the huge **Aquarium of the Pacific,** 100 Aquarium Way, off Shoreline Drive (✆ **562/590-3100;** www.aquariumofpacific.org), featuring recreations of three Pacific habitats, from the warm Tropics to the frigid Bering Sea. More than 12,000 creatures inhabit its three-story tanks, from sharks and sea lions to delicate sea horses and moon jellies. Admission is $24 adults, $12 kids 3 to 11. Open daily from 9am to 6pm.

BEACHES

Los Angeles County's 72-mile coastline sports more than 30 miles of beaches, most of which are operated by the **Department of Beaches & Harbors,** 13837 Fiji Way, Marina del Rey (✆ **310/305-9503;** www.beaches.co.la.ca.us). Parking costs between $2 and $14. For recorded **surf conditions** and coastal weather forecasts, call ✆ **310/457-9701.** The following are the best beaches in L.A., listed from north to south.

Jampacked on warm weekends, **Zuma Beach County Park** is L.A. County's largest beach park, located off the Pacific Coast Highway, a mile past Kanan Dume Road. Although it can't claim to be the most scenic beach in the Southland, Zuma has the most comprehensive facilities: plenty of restrooms, lifeguards, playgrounds, volleyball courts, and snack bars. The southern stretch, toward Point Dume, is **Westward Beach,** separated from the noisy highway by sandstone cliffs.

Not just a pretty white-sand beach, but an estuary and wetlands area as well, **Malibu Lagoon State Beach** is the historic home of the Chumash Indians. The entrance is on the Pacific Coast Highway south of Cross Creek Road. Marine life and shorebirds teem where the creek empties into the sea, and the waves are always mild.

Highway noise prevents solitude at short, narrow **Topanga State Park,** located where Topanga Canyon Boulevard emerges from the mountains. Why go? Ask the surfers who wait in line to catch Topanga's excellent right point breaks. There are restrooms and lifeguard services here, and across the street you'll find one of the best fresh-fish restaurants around. The popular **Will Rogers State Beach,** comprising 3 miles along the Pacific Coast Highway, between Sunset Boulevard and the Santa Monica border, has friendly waves, competitive volleyball games, restrooms, lifeguards, and a snack hut in season.

Santa Monica State Beach, on either side of the Santa Monica Pier, is popular for its white sands and accessibility. A paved path runs along here, allowing you to walk, bike, or skate to Venice. To the south, the wide and friendly **Manhattan Beach** was once a hangout for the Beach Boys. Today, it's lined with beautiful oceanview homes and has some of the best surfing around, plus restrooms, lifeguards, and volleyball courts. Not far away are the wide **Hermosa Beach** and **Redondo Beach.**

SHOPPING

Rodeo Drive and the Golden Triangle, between Santa Monica Boulevard, Wilshire Boulevard, and Canon Drive in Beverly Hills, is the city's (and one of the world's) most famous shopping districts, so chichi and pricey that it's almost like a theme park,

with the theme being *money.* Couture shops from high fashion's old guard are located along these hallowed blocks, along with plenty of newer high-end labels. Come and gawk. Crossing Wilshire a bit east of Rodeo, the blocks of **La Brea Avenue** north of Wilshire are L.A.'s artiest shopping strip, home to lots of great urban antiques stores dealing in Art Deco, Arts and Crafts, 1950s moderne, and the like. You'll also find vintage clothiers, furniture galleries, and other warehouse-size stores, as well as some of the city's hippest restaurants.

In Hollywood, scruffy but fun **Melrose Avenue** is the city's funkiest shopping district, with many secondhand and avant-garde clothing shops as well as good restaurants and almost-guaranteed celebrity sightings. The original **Fred Segal** complex—breezy, ultrahip boutiques linked like departments of a single-story fashion maze—is at 8100 Melrose Ave. (✆ **323/655-3734**). Shops include the latest apparel for men, women, and toddlers, plus lingerie, shoes, hats, luggage, cosmetics, workout/loungewear, and a cafe. Fred Segal also affords major star-spotting potential. A few blocks to the north, **Amoeba Music,** 6400 Sunset Blvd. (✆ **323/245-6400;** www.amoebamusic.com), was described to us by a noted L.A. music critic as "the best record store in the *world,*" and after way too many visits, we have to agree. It carries everything, with a huge selection of used CDs and vinyl as well as new disks and videos.

A few blocks to the south, **West Third Street** between Fairfax and Robertson is a trendy strip with some Melrose Avenue émigrés, along with terrific up-and-comers, cafes, and the like. *Fun* is more the catchword here than *funky,* and the shops are a bit more refined than those along Melrose. It's all anchored on the east end by the **Farmers' Market,** 6333 W. Third St. (✆ **323/933-9211;** www.farmersmarketla.com), a sprawling marketplace with food and produce stalls, a gourmet market, and a wine bar. The original market was just a bunch of Depression-era farmers setting up stands to sell produce, but eventually permanent buildings grew up, including the trademark shingled 10-story clock tower. **The Grove,** 189 The Grove Dr. (✆ **888/315-8883** or 323/900-8080; www.thegrovela.com), is a huge retail complex at the market's eastern end, with all the usual high-end mall stores and architectural styles ranging from Art Deco to Italian Renaissance.

Santa Monica, location of several of our recommended hotels, is also a great place for shopping. **Main Street,** stretching from Pico Boulevard to Rose Avenue, between Fourth Street and Neilson Way, is an excellent area for strolling, crammed with a combination of mall standards and upscale, left-of-center boutiques. You can also find plenty of casually hip cafes and restaurants. The primary strip connecting Santa Monica and Venice, Main Street has a relaxed, beach-community vibe that sets it apart from similar strips. The **Third Street Promenade,** a pedestrian-only stretch of Third between Broadway and Wilshire Boulevard, is packed with chain stores and boutiques as well as dozens of restaurants and three multiscreen cinemas. It's one of the most popular shopping areas in the city, bustling well into the evening.

WHERE TO STAY

If surf and sand compose the Southern California image in your mind's eye, book a hotel along Santa Monica Bay, on the city's west side, stretching from Redondo Beach in the south to Malibu in the northwest. The more southerly properties are an easy drive to or from the cruise terminals, and all of them are a fairly easy drive to Beverly Hills shopping and the Hollywood attractions.

The **Beach House at Hermosa Beach,** 1300 The Strand, Hermosa Beach (✆ **888/895-4559;** www.beach-house.com), sports a Cape Cod style that suits the on-the-sand location. It's luxurious and romantic, with 96 beautifully designed and outfitted split-level studio suites. Rates: from $229.

Marina Pacific Hotel & Suites, 1697 Pacific Ave., Venice (✆ **800/786-7789;** www.mphotel.com), is a haven of smart value just off the Venice boardwalk. The spacious rooms are brightened with beachy colors, the one-bedroom suites (with kitchens and balconies) are terrific for families, and many units have at least partial ocean views. Rates: from $159.

Shutters on the Beach, 1 Pico Blvd., Santa Monica (✆ **800/334-9000;** www.shuttersonthebeach.com), is a Cape Cod–style luxury hotel that sits directly on the beach, a block from Santa Monica Pier. Each unit has a beachview balcony. Try to get one of the beach-cottage rooms overlooking the sand—these are more desirable and no more expensive than those in the hotel's towers. Rates: from $445.

The eight-story, Art Deco **Georgian Hotel,** 1415 Ocean Ave. (✆ **800/538-8147;** www.georgianhotel.com), boasts luxury, loads of historic charm, and a terrific ocean-view location, just across from Santa Monica's beach and pier. Established in 1933, the place was popular among Hollywood's golden-age elite, who enjoyed its veranda lounge and beautifully designed guest rooms. Rates: from $189.

Casa Malibu, sitting on its own private beach at 22752 Pacific Coast Hwy., Malibu (✆ **800/831-0858**), is a leftover jewel from Malibu's golden age and it doesn't try to play the sleek resort game. Instead, the modest, low-rise inn sports a traditional California-beach-cottage look that's cozy and timeless, with 21 comfortable, charming rooms. More than half have ocean views, but even those facing the courtyard are quiet and provide easy beach access via wooden stairs. Rates: from $169.

If you don't care to stay by the beach, here are some choices for different personality/family types:

Nestled in the Bel-Air Estates, inland toward Beverly Hills, the **Hotel Bel-Air,** 701 Stone Canyon Rd. (✆ **800/648-4097;** www.hotelbelair.com), is a stunning Mission-style hotel spread over 12 luxuriant garden acres. All in all, it's one of the most beautiful, romantic, and impressive high-end hotels in the entire state. Expect the best of everything. Rates: from $385. For Oscar-winner wannabes, the **Renaissance Hollywood Hotel,** 1755 N. Highland Ave. (✆ **800/769-4774;** www.renaissancehollywood.com), is part of the Hollywood & Highland complex (see "Exploring L.A. on Your Own," earlier in this chapter). On Oscar night, it's the headquarters for a frenzy of participants and paparazzi, but the rest of the year it's just a centrally located hotel with a nice respect for its location—think guest rooms outfitted like swinging '50s bachelor pads, with wood-paneled headboards and Technicolor furniture. Rates: from $279.

While it's east of the prime Sunset Strip action, the **Days Inn Hollywood,** 7023 Sunset Blvd., between Highland and La Brea (✆ **800/329-7466;** www.daysinn.com), is safe and convenient, and extras such as free underground parking and continental breakfast make it an especially good value for travelers on a budget. Some rooms have microwaves, fridges, and coffeemakers. Rates: from $120.

In downtown L.A., the historic **Millennium Biltmore Hotel,** 506 S. Grand Ave. (✆ **800/245-8673;** www.thebiltmore.com), opened in 1923 and has hosted presidents, kings, and Hollywood celebrities, all of them drawn by its old-world charm,

grand lobby, and warmly elegant rooms. The Gallery Bar and Cognac Room is one of the best places in town for a cocktail, and Sai Sai is among the best Japanese restaurants in downtown L.A. Rates: from $159.

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

For a dinner that channels the ghost of Old Hollywood, head to **Musso & Frank Grill,** 6667 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood (✆ **323/467-7788**). This comfortable, dark-paneled room, virtually unchanged since 1919, begs you to order up one of L.A.'s best martinis and some chops or the legendary chicken potpie. Then listen to the longtime waitstaff wax nostalgic about the days when Orson Welles held court and Faulkner, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway all popped in for a drink between writing screenplays. Main courses: $13 to $35. You'll always find living celebrities, on the other hand, frequenting the Sunset Strip hot spots, the most sizzling of which is the Mondrian hotel and its chic Chino-Latin restaurant, **Asia de Cuba,** 8440 Sunset Blvd., West Hollywood (✆ **323/848-6000;** www.mondrianhotel.com). Main courses: $22 to $79. Celebrity dieters can be glimpsed bypassing the eats for the A-list-only **Skybar** on the other side of the pool.

The **Ivy,** 113 N. Robertson Blvd., West Hollywood (✆ **310/274-8303**), a perennial power-spot, attracts L.A.'s more conservative celebs. Main courses: $23 to $38. Nearby, **Grace,** 7360 Beverly Blvd., West Hollywood (✆ **323/934-4400;** www.gracerestaurant.net), provides a flawless dining experience, from the service to the new American cuisine, the wine, and the decor. Executive chef and co-owner Neal Fraser is a culinary scion of Wolfgang Puck, Thomas Keller, and Joachim Splichal, and has put together a menu that makes for one of the best splurges in the city. Main courses $20 to $33. Just to the west, **Fogo de Chão,** 133 N. La Cienega Blvd., Beverly Hills (✆ **310/289-7755;** www.fogodechao.com), is an enormous Brazilian-style *churrasco* steakhouse—the kind where everything except alcohol is covered by one flat rate and waiters circulate continuously, bringing cuts of slow-roasted meats and endless side dishes until you tell them to stop. FYI, the name is pronounced "Fogo dee *Shown.*" Fixed-price menu: $53.

Many great restaurants are clustered around the Santa Monica area. For some of the best California cuisine in town, head to chef/owner Michael McCarty's eponymous **Michael's,** 1147 Third St., Santa Monica (✆ **310/451-0843;** www.michaelssantamonica.com). Main courses: $31 to $50. The **Border Grill,** 1445 Fourth St., Santa Monica (✆ **310/451-1655;** www.bordergrill.com), fills the ticket if you're craving a taste from south of that border. Main courses: $13 to $25. From here, you can head to Venice's Ocean Front Walk for some primo people-watching. The **Sidewalk Café,** 1401 Ocean Front Walk, Venice (✆ **310/399-5547;** www.thesidewalkcafe.com), allows unobstructed views of parading skaters, bikers, skateboarders, musclemen, break dancers, street performers, sword swallowers, and other participants in the daily carnival. You can also get your dinner here, if you think you won't be distracted. Main courses: $8 to $18.

Bar none, the most classic L.A. thing you can do after the sun goes down is take a picnic dinner to the **Hollywood Bowl,** 2301 N. Highland Ave., Hollywood (✆ **323/850-2000;** www.hollywoodbowl.org). In addition to being the summer home of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Bowl hosts visiting performers ranging from chamber-music quartets to jazz greats to folk humorists. The imposing white band shell always elicits appreciative gasps from first-time Bowl-goers. Don't forget your bottle of

wine. If you prefer your entertainment with a roof, the **Walt Disney Concert Hall,** at First Street and Grand Avenue, downtown (✆ **213/972-7211;** www.disneyhall.com), should fit the bill. The strikingly beautiful hall, designed by Frank Gehry, has a dazzling 2,273-seat auditorium, plus a cafe, bookstore, gift shop, and Joachim Splichal's flagship restaurant, **Patina** (✆ **213/972-3331;** www.patinagroup.com/patina; main courses: $31–$40). The concert hall is open to the public for viewing, but to witness it in full glory, attend a concert by the world-class Philharmonic.

9 Miami, Florida

It's the most Latin city in the U.S., with a hot-hot-hot club scene, sparkling beaches, crystal-clear waters, and more palm fronds, glittering hotels, and red sports cars than anywhere outside Monte Carlo and Rio. On top of all that, Miami is also the undisputed cruise capital of the world, with more than four million passengers going through annually, and more supersize ships berthing here than anywhere else.

GETTING TO MIAMI & THE PORT

The **Port of Miami** is at 1015 N. America Way on Dodge Island (✆ **305/371-7678;** www.miamidade.gov/portofmiami), reached via a four-lane bridge from Miami's downtown district. **Miami International Airport** (✆ **305/876-7000;** www.miami-airport.com) is about 8 miles west of downtown Miami and the port (about a 15-min. drive). If you've arranged air transportation and/or transfers through your cruise line, a representative will meet you and direct you to shuttle buses to the port. **Taxis** are also available; the fare is about $25. Blue taxis serve only the immediate area around the airport; yellow taxis serve all other destinations, including the port. **SuperShuttle** (✆ **305/871-2000;** www.supershuttle.com) charges $14 per person (with two pieces of luggage) to the port.

If you're arriving by car from the north, take I-95 to I-395 and head east on I-395, exiting at Biscayne Boulevard. Make a right and go south to Port Boulevard. Make a left and go over the Port Bridge. Arriving from the northwest, take I-75 to S.R. 826 (Palmetto Expwy.) south to S.R. 836 east. Exit at Biscayne Boulevard. Make a right and go south to Port Boulevard. Make a left and go over the Port Bridge. Parking lots right at street level face the cruise terminals. Parking costs $15 per day.

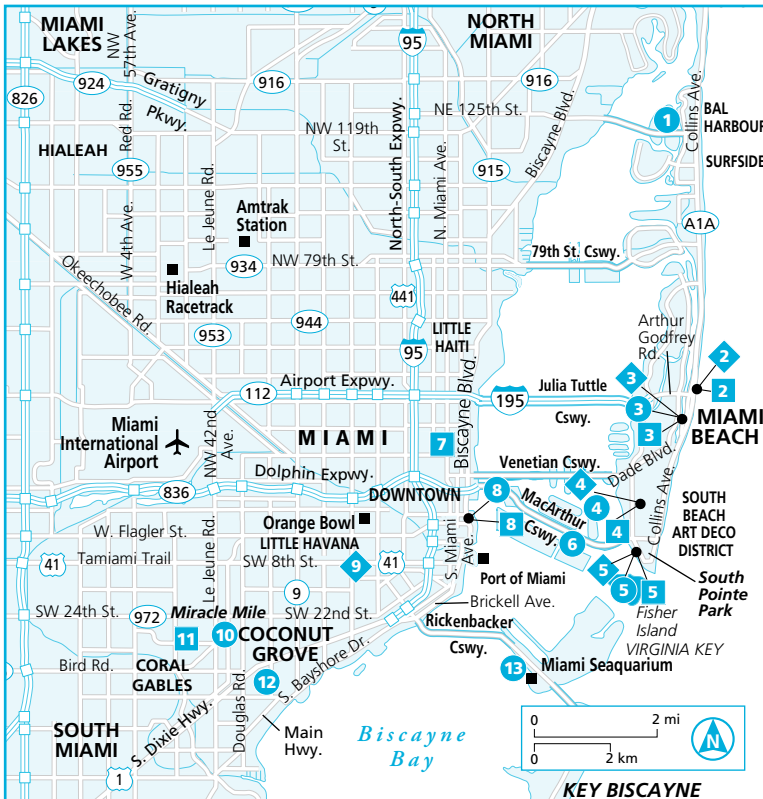
GETTING AROUND **Taxis** start at $2.50 for the first ¼ mile and cost $2.40 for each additional mile. Fares to some frequently traveled routes are standardized. Almost two dozen taxi companies serve Miami–Dade County, including **Yellow Cab** (✆ **305/444-4444**) and, on Miami Beach, **Central** (✆ **305/532-5555**). There's also the **Metromover** (✆ **305/770-3131**), a 4⅓-mile elevated line that circles downtown, stopping near important attractions and shopping (including Bayfront Park and Bayside Marketplace). It's fun if you've got time to kill. It runs daily from about 5am to midnight; there are 21 stations spaced about 2 blocks apart each; and service is free.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Everglades Airboat Ride ($69, 4 hr.): The Seminole Indians called the Everglades Pahay Okee, the "grassy water," and on this 40-minute airboat ride, you'll get to see some of the area's indigenous wildlife, including water birds and American alligators.

EXPLORING MIAMI ON YOUR OWN

A sizzling, multicultural mecca, Miami offers the best in cutting-edge restaurants, unusual attractions, entertainment, shopping, beaches, and the whole range of hotels,



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from luxury to boutique, kitschy to charming. Miami's best attraction is actually a neighborhood, the **South Beach Art Deco District,** located at the southern end of Miami Beach below 20th Street. It's filled with outrageous and fanciful 1920s and 1930s architecture, plus outrageous and fanciful 21st-century people. This treasure-trove, usually just called "the Beach" or "SoBe," features more than 900 pastel-painted buildings in the Art Deco, streamline moderne, and Spanish Mediterranean Revival styles. The district stretches from 6th to 23rd streets, and from the Atlantic Ocean to Lennox Court. Ocean Drive boasts many of the premier Art Deco hotels.

Also in South Beach, the **Bass Museum of Art,** 2121 Park Ave. (✆ **305/673-7530;** www.bassmuseum.org), is Miami's most progressive art museum, with an expanded building designed by Arata Isozakii; a permanent collection of European paintings from the 15th through the early 20th century (including Dutch and Flemish old masters); and collections of textiles, period furnishings, objets d'art, ecclesiastical artifacts, and sculpture. Rotating exhibits include pop art, fashion, and photography. Admission is $8 for adults, $6 for seniors and students.

The adjoining **Coral Gables** and **Coconut Grove** neighborhoods are fun to visit for both their architecture and ambience. In Coral Gables, the Old World meets the New as curving boulevards, sidewalks, plazas, fountains, and arched entrances evoke Seville. Today, the area is an Epicurean's Eden, boasting some of Miami's most renowned eateries as well as the University of Miami and the half-mile-long Miracle Mile, a 5-block retail mecca (see "Shopping," below). Coconut Grove, South Florida's oldest settlement, remains a village surrounded by the urban sprawl of Miami. It dates back to the early 1800s, when Bahamian seamen first sought to salvage treasure from the wrecked vessels stranded along the Florida Reef. People come here mostly to shop, drink, dine, or simply walk around and explore.

Just minutes from the Port of Miami in Key Biscayne, the **Miami Seaquarium,** 4400 Rickenbacker Causeway (✆ **305/361-5705;** www.miamiseaquarium.com), is a delight. Dolphins such as Flipper, TV's greatest sea mammal, perform along with Lolita the Killer Whale. You can also see endangered manatees, sea lions, tropical-theme aquariums, and the gruesome shark feeding. Admission is $36 adults, $27 kids.

BEACHES

A 300-foot-wide sand beach runs for about 10 miles from south of **Miami Beach** to **Haulover Beach Park** in the north. (For those of you who like to get an all-over tan, Haulover is a nude beach.) Although most of this stretch is lined with a solid wall of hotels, beach access is plentiful, and you are free to frolic along the entire strip. A wooden boardwalk runs along the hotel side from 21st to 46th streets—about 1½ miles. You'll find lots of public beaches here, wide and well maintained, with lifeguards, toilet facilities, concession stands, and metered parking (bring lots of quarters). Lifeguard-protected public beaches include **21st Street,** at the beginning of the boardwalk; **35th Street,** popular with an older crowd; **46th Street,** next to the Fontainebleau Hilton; **53rd Street,** a narrower, more sedate beach; **64th Street,** one of the quietest strips around; and **72nd Street,** a local old-timers' spot. On the southern tip of the beach is family-favorite **South Pointe Park,** where you can watch the cruise ships. **Lummus Park,** in the center of the Art Deco District, is the best place for people-watching and model spotting. The stretch between 11th and 13th streets is a gay beach. The area from 1st to 15th streets is popular with seniors.

In Key Biscayne, **Crandon Park,** 4000 Crandon Blvd. (✆ **305/361-5421**), is one of metropolitan Miami's finest white-sand beaches, stretching for some 3½ miles. There are lifeguards here, and you can rent a cabana with a shower and chairs for $20 per day. On Saturday and Sunday, the beach can be especially crowded.

SHOPPING

Most cruise ship passengers shop right near the Port of Miami at **Bayside Marketplace,** 401 Biscayne Blvd. (✆ **305/577-3344;** www.baysidemarketplace.com), a mall with 150 specialty shops, street performers, live music, and some 30 eateries, including a Hard Rock Cafe and others serving everything from Cuban to crepes. Many restaurants have outdoor seating right along the bay for picturesque views of the yachts harbored here. The mall can be reached via regular shuttle service from the port or by walking over the Port Bridge.

Bal Harbour Shops, 9700 Collins Ave. (✆ **305/866-0311;** www.balharbourshops.com), is one of the most prestigious fashion meccas in the country, with big-name stores including Chanel, Prada, Armani, Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue, and dozens of others.

In South Beach, **Lincoln Road,** an 8-block pedestrian mall, runs between Washington Avenue and Alton Road, near the northern tier of the Art Deco District. It's filled with popular chains such as Victoria's Secret and Banana Republic, interior-design stores, art galleries, and clothing boutiques, as well as coffeehouses, restaurants, and cafes. Despite the recent influx of commercial anchor stores, Lincoln Road still manages to maintain its funky, arty flair, attracting an eclectic, colorful crowd. Or try **Espanola Way,** a small pedestrian road with a European feel that starts at 15th Street and Collins.

Coconut Grove, centered on the intersection of Main Highway and Grand Avenue, is the heart of the city's boutique district and features two open-air shopping-and-entertainment complexes, **CocoWalk,** 3015 Grand Ave. (✆ **305/444-0777;** www.cocowalk.net), and the **Streets of Mayfair,** 2911 Grand Ave. (✆ **305/448-1700**).

In Coral Gables, **Miracle Mile,** actually a half-mile stretch of S.W. 22nd Street between Douglas and Le Jeune roads (aka 37th and 42nd aves.), has more than 150 shops. The **Village of Merrick Park,** 358 San Lorenzo Ave. at S.W. 42nd Ave. (✆ **305/529-0200;** www.villageofmerrickpark.com), gives the Bal Harbour Shops a run for their money with high-end stores such as Jimmy Choo, Sonia Rykiel, Neiman Marcus, Miami's very first Nordstrom, and upscale eateries such as the Palm.

WHERE TO STAY

Two hotels—the 34-story **Hotel Inter-Continental Miami,** 100 Chopin Plaza (✆ **800/327-3005;** www.intercontinental.com/miami; rates: from $179), and the **Biscayne Bay Marriott,** 1633 N. Bayshore (✆ **800/228-9290;** www.marriott.com/miami; rates: from $149)—are right across the bay from the cruise ship piers, near Bayside Marketplace. Thanks to Miami's good highway network, though, you can stay virtually anywhere in Greater Miami and still be within 10 to 20 minutes of your ship.

SOUTH BEACH Two blocks from the beach, the Art Deco, comfy-chic **Hotel Astor,** 956 Washington Ave. (✆ **800/270-4981;** www.hotelastor.com), was originally built in 1936. It has opened a new restaurant, Maison D'Azur, and made significant renovations to its guest rooms and public areas. Rates: from $155.

The **Catalina Hotel & Beach Club,** 1732 Collins Ave. (✆ **305/674-1160;** www.catalinahotel.com), is one of the newer boutique hotels on South Beach, with a retro *Mod Squad* decor, rooms glazed in white with hints of bright colors, and a happening bar and lounge scene with a decidedly European jet-set vibe. You can get poolside manicures and pedicures at the splashy beach club. Rates: from $125. If Catalina is sold out, check out its sister hotel, the **Metropole Suites**, 635 Collins Ave. (✆ **305/672-0009;** wwwmetropolesouthbeach.com), another favorite for hipsters and recording artists. Rates: from $195. The **Hotel,** 801 Collins Ave., at Eighth Street (✆ **305/531-2222;** www.thehotelofsouthbeach.com), is a Deco gem with a stylishly whimsical interior designed by haute couturier Todd Oldham. Rates: from $215.

It's hard to find a hotel on South Beach with both good value and excellent service, but the **Crest Hotel Suites,** 1670 James Ave. (✆ **800/531-3880;** www.cresthotel.com), delivers. It's one of Miami's best bargains and coolest hotels, retaining its original 1939 Art Deco architecture but with a thoroughly modern interior. Rates: from $115. If you're on a budget, but want a cozy Deco feel, try the **Best Western South Beach,** 1050 Washington Ave. (✆ **888/343-1930;** www.bestwestern.com). Rates: from $72.

MIAMI BEACH At the **Indian Creek Hotel and Suites,** 2727 Indian Creek Dr., at 28th Street (✆ **800/491-2772;** www.indiancreekhotel.com), each room has hardwood floors and modern decor. Rates: from $69. The **Eden Roc Resort and Spa,** 4525 Collins Ave. (✆ **800/327-8337** or 305/531-0000; www.edenrocresort.com), was a Rat Pack hangout in the 50s, but a recent $110-million renovation completely transformed the place, adding a 283-room oceanfront tower, five pools, two restaurants, and a spa. Rates: from $199.

Speaking of face-lifts, the historic Deco landmark **Fontainebleau Hotel and Resort,** 4441 Collins Ave. (✆ **800/548-8886** or 305/538-2000; www.fontainebleau.com), received the mother of all face-lifts, giving it the trappings of a luxury hotel, a 40,000-square-foot spa with mineral-rich water therapies, and 11 restaurants and lounges run by celebrity chefs from New York and London. Choose from the main property or the modern, brand-new all-suite hotel tower, where rooms are plush and posh. Rates: from $229.

CORAL GABLES The famous **Biltmore Hotel,** 1200 Anastasia Ave. (✆ **305/445-1926;** www.biltmorehotel.com), opened its doors in 1926 and has hosted the likes of Al Capone and the duke and duchess of Windsor. The place is a national landmark, with the largest hotel pool in the continental United States as well as a 300-foot bell tower modeled after the Cathedral of Seville. Rates: from $229. Even if you're not staying here, you can take a free tour on Sundays at 1:30, 2:30, and 3:30pm, conducted by the Dade Heritage Trust.

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

Count on **South Beach** as your dining and nightlife spot, with dozens of first-rate restaurants and cafes. With very few exceptions, the places on **Ocean Drive** are crowded with tourists and priced accordingly. You'll do better to venture a little farther into the pedestrian-friendly streets just west. The **Lincoln Road** pedestrian-mall area is so packed with places offering great food and atmosphere that it would take a full guidebook to list them all. We recommend strolling and browsing. A couple of standout outdoor cafes are **Spris,** a pizzeria at 731 Lincoln Rd. (✆ **305/673-2020;** www.spris.cc; main courses: $5–$14), and the **Van Dyke Cafe,** 846 Lincoln Rd.

(✆ **305/534-3600;** main courses: $10–$20). **Sushi Samba,** 600 Lincoln Rd. (✆ **305/673-5337**), features a fusion of Brazilian, Peruvian, and Japanese cuisine (main courses $17–$27; sushi priced by the piece), while **Nobu,** at the Shore Club, 1901 Collins Ave. (✆ **305/695-3232**), is, of course, legendary for its nouvelle Japanese cuisine (main courses: $21–$80; *omakase* "chef's choice" menu from $70).

Even if Gloria Estefan weren't co-owner of **Larios on the Beach,** 820 Ocean Dr. (✆ **305/532-9577**), the crowds would still flock to this bistro, which serves old-fashioned Cuban dishes such as *masitas de puerco* (fried pork chunks). Main courses: $13 to $19. For a steakhouse vibe, try **Prime One Twelve,** at the Browns Hotel, 112 Ocean Dr., South Beach (✆ **305/532-8112;** www.prime112.com), which has a sleek ambience, a bustling bar, and arguably the best beef in the entire city. A powerhouse crowd gathers here for lunch and dinner, and reservations are more rare than the yellowfin tuna tartare appetizer. Main courses: $20 to $88.

At the legendary **Joe's Stone Crab,** 11 Washington Ave., Miami Beach, between South Point Drive and First Street (✆ **305/673-0365**), about a ton of stone crab claws are served daily during stone crab season from October to May (usually closed May 15–Oct 15). Because the place doesn't take reservations, the wait for a table can be up to 2 hours. Crab prices vary depending on the market rate, but figure about $25 per order.

After dark, look for the klieg lights to direct you to the hot spots of South Beach. While the blocks of Washington Avenue, Collins Avenue, and Ocean Drive are the main nightlife thoroughfares, you'll have better luck spotting a celebrity in a more off-the-beaten-path eatery such as **Barton G. The Restaurant,** 1427 W. Ave., Miami Beach (✆ **305/672-8881;** www.bartong.com/restaurant; main courses: $10–$50), or the **Forge,** 432 41st St., Miami Beach (✆ **305/538-8533;** www.theforge.com; main courses: $26–$60), an ornately decorated rococo-style venue with a fine wine selection. Also popular are the hotel bars, such as the Shore Club's hot, hauter-than-thou celeb magnet **Skybar,** 1901 Collins Ave. (✆ **786/276-6772;** www.shoreclub.com).

For a change of pace from the fast-paced glitz of South Beach or the serene luxury of Coral Gables, head for **Little Havana,** where pre-Castro Cubans commingle with young artists who have begun to set up performance spaces in the area. It's just west of downtown Miami on S.W. Eighth Street. In addition to authentic Cuban cuisine, the cafe Cubano culture is alive and well.

10 Montréal, Québec

A good number of New England/Canada cruises sail north- or southbound between Boston or New York and the beautiful city of Montréal, an island set deep into the St. Lawrence River southwest of Québec City.

One of the most European cities in North America, Montréal has a strong French heritage dating from the 16th century, when explorer Jacques Cartier arrived here in 1535, believing the wide St. Lawrence River was the ocean and the way to the Orient. As with Québec City, a few hours upriver, it was the fur and timber trade that eventually put Montréal on the map. British and French forces battled for rights to the region in 1759: Britain won, but the French influences on language, food, and overall culture remained. Today the legacies of both heritages survive in force. French speakers still make up about 70% of the city's population, but many locals grow up speaking both French and English. (***Note:*** Provincial law requires that signs be French-only, so information here includes both the French names and English translations to help you get your bearings.)

It's that tenacious French connection that gives the province overall and Montréal itself its special character. Montréal is a cosmopolitan city full of historic neighborhoods and thriving restaurants. It's even good-looking below ground: A mazelike Underground Pedestrian Network was born in the 1960s with the idea of keeping Montréalers warm during the frigid winters. Head down and you'll find a controlled climate where it's eternally spring, with some 938 retailers, 362 restaurants and food court eateries, and 13 cinemas in or connected to the network—not to mention waterfalls, fountains, and trees with hanging vines.

For much of 2008, U.S. and Canadian dollars were essentially equal in value. In 2009, though, the U.S. dollar had gained in strength, with C$1 = US83¢ (another way to say the same thing: US$1 buys C$1.20). Exchange rates fluctuate, however, so prices may not be exactly the same when you arrive in port.

GETTING TO MONTREAL & THE PORT

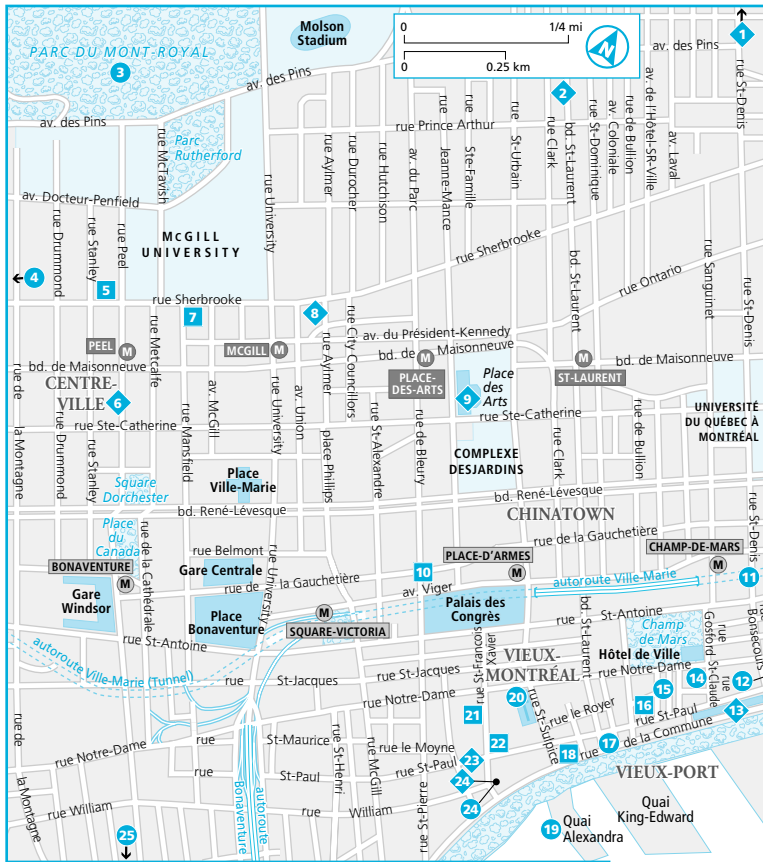
Cruise ships call at the **Iberville Cruise Terminal** at the Port of Montréal on de la Commune Street. For more information, contact the **Montréal Port Authority** (✆ **514/283-7011;** www.port-montreal.com). If you're flying in, you'll come through **Aéroport International Pierre-Elliot-Trudeau de Montréal** (airport code YUL; ✆ **800/465-1213** or 514/394-7377; www.admtl.com), more commonly known as Montréal-Trudeau Airport. The **L'Aérobus shuttle** (✆ **514/631-1856**) travels between the airport and downtown for C$15 (US$12) one way for adults. **Taxis** between downtown Montréal and the airport cost a flat rate of C$35 (US$29) plus tip and take less than 30 minutes if traffic isn't tangled.

U.S. Interstates 87, 89, and 91 link up with Canada's autoroutes at the U.S./Canada border and flow right into Montréal. The Trans-Canada Highway, which connects both ends of the country, runs through the city. Once in Montréal, follow the signs to Vieux-Montréal and Vieux-Port. The street that runs alongside the water is rue de la Commune.

GETTING AROUND Ships dock in the **Vieux-Port (Old Port)** district, which has been renovated substantially since the late 1980s. One block inland, this area is simply called **Vieux-Montréal (Old Montréal).** With atmospherically teeny streets, pedestrian promenades, and wide green spaces by the water, these neighborhoods are easiest to explore by foot. The **Métro** (subway) system is fast and efficient, and single rides cost C$2.75 (US$2.30). The closest stop to Vieux-Port is Place d'Armes, about a 10-minute walk from the water. Note that accessibility is sometimes difficult for people with mobility problems, as many stops require the use of escalators and stairs. Plenty of **taxis** queue up at the cruise terminal if you'd rather go that route for sightseeing, although drivers do not serve as guides. Rates are metered, with an initial C$3.15 (US$2.60) charge.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Montréal Highlights ($50, 2½ hr.): Because Montréal is generally a port of embarkation only, the cruise lines generally offer just a basic city tour on the day passengers debark, and it typically ends at the airport. This bus tour of Montréal's most famed attractions includes a visit to Mont Royal, which towers above the city, plus a drive through the major shopping districts, and finally to Old Montréal to get a look at the remarkable concentration of 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-century buildings.



CRUISE TERMINAL 19 ●

ATTRACTIONS & SHOPPING ●

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Pointe-à-Callière **24**
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Rue St-Denis **11**
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MCGILL Métro Green Line stop
BONAVENTURE Métro Orange Line stop

ACCOMMODATIONS ■

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Auberge du Vieux-Port **16**
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EXPLORING MONTREAL ON YOUR OWN

If you have only a few hours before your cruise departs, a stroll around **Vieux-Montréal (Old Montréal)** is a must. The city was born here in 1642, when the colony of Ville-Marie was founded by the soldiers of Paul de Chomedey, by the river at Pointe-à-Callière. Today, especially in summer, activity centers around **Place Jacques-Cartier,** a scenic plaza that borders the riverfront. Cafe tables line narrow terraces and flower sellers, artists, street performers, and strolling locals and tourists congregate. Head any direction off of the plaza to see the restored 18th- and 19th-century buildings that have been adapted for use as shops, boutique hotels, galleries, restaurants, and apartments. In the evening, many of the finer buildings here are illuminated.

Among the most worthwhile sites in walking distance is **Pointe-à-Callière,** the **Montréal Museum of Archaeology and History,** 350 Place Royale (at rue de la Commune; ✆ **514/872-9150;** www.pacmuseum.qc.ca). A 16-minute multimedia show in an auditorium that stands above actual exposed ruins of the old city provides a terrific introduction to the city. There's also a self-guided tour through a subterranean complex. Admission is C$13 (US$11).

Gothic-Revival **Basilique Notre-Dame (Notre-Dame Basilica),** 110 rue Notre-Dame ouest (✆ **514/842-2925;** www.basiliquenddm.org), built between 1824 and 1829, has a stunning interior of sculpted wood, gold leaf, and stained glass. Admission is C$5 (US$4.15). The 18th-century **Musée du Château Ramezay (Château Ramezay Museum),** 280 rue Notre-Dame est (✆ **514/861-3708;** www.chateauramezay.qc.ca), is another must. Formerly the governor's home, it's now a history museum with exhibits on Montréal and Québec. Admission is C$9 (US$7.45).

If you're in the mood for a stroll, head to the **Lachine Canal,** which starts right at the Old Port. The canal was opened for recreational use in 1997 after much renovation and is lined with 19th-century industrial buildings, many of which are being converted into high-end apartments. Paths on either side are good for walking or biking. Bike rentals are available at **ÇaRoule/Montréal on Wheels** (✆ **514/866-0633;** www.caroulemontreal.com) at 27 rue de la Commune est, the waterfront road. For something woodsier, head to **Parc du Mont-Royal (Mount Royal Park).** The city of Montréal (which translates as "Royal Mountain") is named for it, and it's well used by locals. Paths lead all through the park to a top view of the city and the St. Lawrence River.

If you're staying for a few days, explore Montréal's other neighborhoods. **Rue St-Denis** is the thumping central artery of Francophone Montréal, running from the Latin Quarter downtown north into the **Plateau Mont-Royal** residential neighborhood. Thick with bistros, offbeat shops, and lively nightspots, it is to Montréal what boulevard St-Germain is to Paris; if you want to know what the youth and young adults of Montréal are all about, spend an evening here.

SHOPPING

In Vieux-Montréal, **Rue St-Paul** (St-Paul St.) and the narrow cobblestone streets off of it have art galleries, high-end clothing boutiques, and interesting jewelry shops. They sometimes sit elbow to elbow with T-shirt shops and souvenir stands in this most heavily touristed area of the city. The silver-domed **Bonsecours Market,** on the eastern end of the street at 350 rue St-Paul est and a prominent icon of the port skyline, was built in the mid-1800s and is lined with small galleries and lively cafes with terraces.

In downtown Montréal, **Rue Sherbrooke** is the major shopping street for international and domestic designers, luxury items such as furs and jewelry, and art galleries. The Holt Renfrew department store is on Sherbrooke, and the blocks near the **Musée des Beaux-Arts** (Museum of Fine Arts) are thick with antiques shops. Farther from the port, in the Plâteau Mont-Royal neighborhood north of downtown, **Rue St-Denis** has strings of shops filled with fun, funky items, especially near the rue Rachel cross street.

Some of the best shopping in Montréal is in city museums. Tops among them are the boutiques in **Pointe-à-Callière,** in Vieux-Montréal, which sell toys and home items such as maple spoons made by Québec artist Tom Littledeer, and the **Musée des Beaux-Arts,** which has more arts and crafts.

WHERE TO STAY

Accommodations in Montréal range from soaring glass skyscraper lodgings and grand boulevard hotels to converted row houses. There's a large number of stylish inns and boutique hotels close to the port in Vieux-Montréal. Except at bed-and-breakfasts, visitors can almost always count on discounts and package deals—especially on weekends, when the hotels' business clients have packed their bags and gone home.

In Vieux-Montréal, the plush **Hôtel Nelligan,** 106 rue St-Paul ouest (✆ **877/788-2040** or 514/788-2040; www.hotelnelligan.com), expanded in 2007 from 63 to 105 units. It has a great full-service restaurant **(Versa),** goose-down duvets on the beds, and a rooftop terrace. Rates: from C$235 (US$195). Romantic, upscale **Auberge du Vieux-Port,** 97 rue de la Commune est (✆ **888/660-7678** or 514/876-0081; www.aubergeduvieuxport.com), is right on the waterfront and has bedrooms with exposed brick and stone walls and a small, sophisticated wine bar off the lobby, often with live jazz on the weekends. Rates: from C$230 (US$191). The cozy **Auberge Les Passants du Sans Soucy,** 171 rue St-Paul ouest (✆ **514/842-2634;** www.lesanssoucy.com), built in a former fur warehouse from 1723, is a more upscale and stylish B&B than most of its peers and is within a block of nearly a dozen good places to eat. Rates: from C$160 (US$133). If Sans Soucy is booked up, around the corner is **Auberge Bonaparte,** 447 rue St-François-Xavier (✆ **514/844-1448;** www.bonaparte.com), a graceful, urban inn with 31 units. Generous breakfasts, included in the cost of the room, are served in the stately **Bonaparte** restaurant. Rates: from C$170 (US$141).

For a more urban downtown experience, the **Sofitel Montréal Golden Mile,** 1155 rue Sherbrooke ouest (✆ **514/285-9000;** www.sofitel.com), is part of the French hotel chain and matches its luxury rivals in every detail. Its **Renoir** restaurant is good, and there's a 24-hour gym. Rates: from C$185 (US$154). **Hôtel Le Germain,** 2050 rue Mansfield (✆ **877/333-2050** or 514/849-2050; www.hotelgermain.com), with 101 units, offers a magical mix of Asian minimalism and Western comforts and is home to **Laurie Raphaël Montréal,** an offshoot Québec City's most esteemed restaurant. Rates: from C$210 (US$174). A good budget option, the **Hôtel Le Dauphin,** 1025 rue de Bleury (✆ **888/784-3888** or 514/788-3888; www.hotelsdauphin.ca), is simple and clean. Each unit is equipped with a computer terminal and free Internet access, and the hotel is centrally located at the edge of both Vieux-Montréal and downtown. Rates: from C$150 (US$125).

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

You could never leave Vieux-Montréal and still eat well for a week. If stylish, innovative French food is your main goal, then get a reservation at **Toqué!**, 900 Place Jean-Paul-Riopelle (✆ **514/499-2084;** www.restaurant-toque.com), which is in a league of its own. Main courses: C$32 to C$45 (US$27–US$37); tasting menus C$92 or C$104 (US$76 or US$86). **Chez l'Epicier,** 331 rue St-Paul est (✆ **514/878-2232;** www.chezlepicier.com), is a crisp little eatery that functions as both a high-end delicatessen with takeout food and a fashionable restaurant with Asian ingredients. Main courses: C$26 to C$39 (US$22–US$32). For good value, **Le Bourlingueur,** 363 rue St-François-Xavier (✆ **514/845-3646;** www.lebourlingueur.ca), is a bistro well short of chic, but features roast pork with apple sauce, *choucroute garnie* (sauerkraut with meat), seafood dishes, and four-course *(table d'hôte)* meals at low prices—C$11 to C$22 (US$9.15–US$18). The Vieux-Montréal restaurant **Modavie,** 1 rue St-Paul ouest (✆ **514/287-9582;** www.modavie.com), offers live jazz along with dinner, nightly from 7 until about 10pm. Main courses: C$17 to C$37 (US$14–US$31).

Of course, French isn't your only choice. For Indian, **Gandhi,** 230 rue St-Paul ouest (✆ **514/845-5866;** www.restaurantgandhi.com), offers subtle flavorings, with tandoori duck and lamb, chicken tikka, and vegetarian options among the top choices. Main courses: C$13 to C$19 (US$11–US$16). Just beyond Vieux-Montréal in downtown, **Ferreira Café,** 1446 rue Peel (✆ **514/848-0988;** www.ferreiracafe.com) is a splashy, high-end Portuguese restaurant, where you can indulge in *cataplana,* a venerated stew of mussels, clams, potatoes, shrimp, chouriço sausage, and chunks of cod and salmon. Main courses: C$28 to C$42 (US$23–US$35).

No matter where you eat, keep an eye out for *table d'hôte* meals. Ubiquitous here, they are fixed-price menus with three or four courses, and usually cost a little more than the price of a single a la carte main course. Restaurants at all price ranges offer them, and they represent the best value around.

For a true Montréal experience, look for *poutine,* french fries doused with gravy and cheese curds—a Québécois comfort food that's available as both fast food and on fancier menus. Or take the Métro to the Sherbrooke stop to make a pilgrimage to **Chez Schwartz Charcuterie Hébraïque de Montréal,** 3895 bd. St-Laurent (✆ **514/842-4813;** www.schwartzsdeli.com). Known simply as Schwartz's to its fans, this is the place to indulge in the guilty treat of *viande fume,* a kind of brisket whose name simply translates as "smoked meat." With only a lunch counter and simple tables crammed close together, this is as nondescript a culinary landmark as you'll find. Sandwiches and meat plates run C$4 to C$17 (US$3.30–US$14).

Discount tickets for cultural events are sold at **Vitrine culturelle de Montréal** ("cultural window of Montréal"; ✆ **866/924-5538** or 514/285-4545; http://vitrine.cyberpresse.ca), in downtown's Place des Arts at 145 rue Sainte-Catherine ouest. For an evening of jazz, one of the city's best-known treats, the **Maison de Jazz,** 2060 rue Aylmer (✆ **514/842-8656;** www.houseofjazz.ca), has live music every night beginning around 8pm in a room decorated in mock Art Nouveau style. It's downtown and costs C$5 (US$4.15). For a more spontaneous night out, head to **Rue Crescent,** one of Montréal's major nightlife districts. The area's center is rue Crescent between rue Sherbrooke and boulevard René-Lévesque, on the northwest edge of the downtown skyscrapers. Here you'll find restaurants with outdoor cafes and bars, clubs of all styles, and a party atmosphere that never fades.

11 New Orleans, Louisiana

Yes, New Orleans is still there. And yes, most of the places where visitors go still look exactly as they did before Hurricane Katrina did a number on the city in 2005. The **French Quarter,** the oldest and most historic part of the city, saw no flooding and survived almost completely intact, minus a few details. Ditto for the **Garden District,** that area full of beautiful ornate homes to the southwest. Things were much worse, though, out beyond the tourist areas, and recovery there is still ongoing. Psychologically, the whole city is still in recovery mode, but day-to-day life, business, and tourism is definitely back on track. The Big Easy? Maybe not as easy at it once was, but give it time.

GETTING TO NEW ORLEANS & THE PORT

Cruise ships depart from the **Julia Street Wharf** and the newer **Erato Street Cruise Terminal,** located adjacent to each other on the east bank of the Mississippi, south of the French Quarter. Both are operated by the **Port of New Orleans** (✆ **504/522-2551;** www.portno.com). The port is also planning construction of an additional cruise terminal on the **Poland Avenue Wharf,** in the Bywater area just east of the French Quarter. If you're flying in, you'll probably land at **Louis Armstrong International Airport** (✆ **504/464-0831;** www.flymsy.com), about 17 miles from the cruise terminal. A **taxi** costs $29 for two people to the terminal or downtown.

If you're driving, take I-10 east to New Orleans, follow the signs to the New Orleans Business District, U.S. 90 West, Crescent City Connection to the West Bank. Take the last exit before crossing the Mississippi River (exit 11C, Tchoupitoulas and South Peters sts.). Take the down ramp to ground level, go to the second stoplight (Tchoupitoulas St.), and turn right. Go to the next stoplight (Henderson St.) and turn left. Go 2 blocks, cross over the railroad tracks, and turn left. The cruise terminals will be directly ahead.

GETTING AROUND Taxis are plentiful. If you're not near a taxi stand, call **United Cabs** (✆ **504/522-9771;** www.unitedcabs.com) and a car will come in 10 minutes. Rates are $2.50 to start, plus $1.60 per mile (20¢ per ⅛-mile) thereafter, with a $1 surcharge for additional passengers. The famous **St. Charles streetcar** (www.norta.com/stcharles) from the French Quarter to the Garden District was out of service for more than 2 years after Katrina, but is now back up and running, with a main boarding point at the intersection of Carondelet and Canal streets. The fare is $1.25 each way.

From Jackson Square (at Decatur St.), you can ride a horse-drawn carriage through the French Quarter. **Royal Carriages** (✆ **504/943-8820;** www.neworleanscarriages.com) gives private half-hour rides for up to four passengers for $60 a pop, daily from 8:30am to midnight.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

City Tour ($40, 5 hr.): Offered post-cruise, this bus tour takes in St. Charles Avenue, the Superdome, the Loyola and Tulane University campuses, Audubon Park and City Park, the Garden District, and the French Quarter, where you get 2 hours to poke around before transferring to the airport.

EXPLORING NEW ORLEANS ON YOUR OWN

Comprising about 90 square blocks, the **French Quarter** (also known as the Vieux Carré, or "Old Square") was laid out by the French engineer Adrien de Pauger in

1718, and a strict preservation policy pre-Katrina (and high ground and good luck during and after the storm) has kept it looking much as it always has. Its major public area is **Jackson Square** (bounded by Chartres, Decatur, St. Peter, and St. Ann sts.), where musicians, artists, fortunetellers, jugglers, and those silver "living statue" guys gather to sell their wares or entertain for change. The quarter's main drag, however, is **Bourbon Street,** a lively strip with rowdy bars and music clubs. Many of the quarter's best attractions are covered under "Dining & Nightlife," below, but here are some of its more historic highlights.

Incorporating seven historic buildings connected by a brick courtyard, the **Historic New Orleans Collection,** 533 Royal St., between St. Louis and Toulouse streets (✆ **504/523-4662;** www.hnoc.org), evokes the New Orleans of 200 years ago. The oldest building in the complex escaped the tragic fire of 1794. The others hold exhibitions about Louisiana's culture and history. Admission is free; closed Monday.

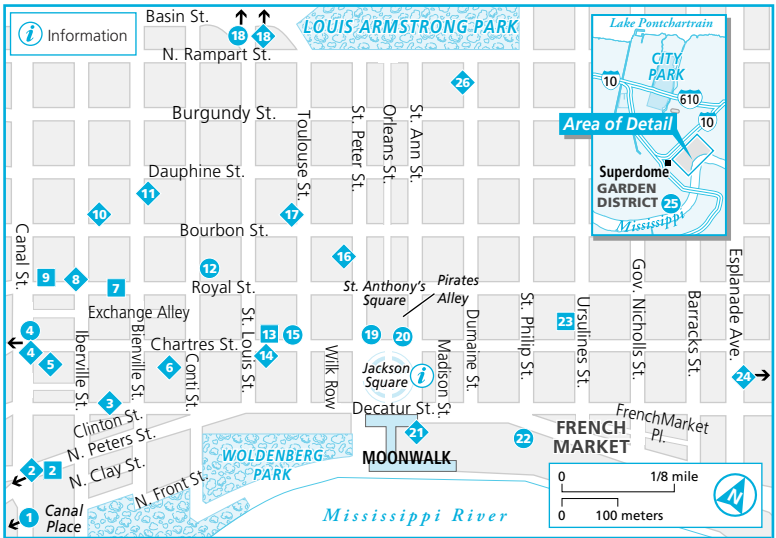
Founded in 1950, the **New Orleans Pharmacy Museum,** 514 Chartres St., at St. Louis Street (✆ **504/565-8027;** www.pharmacymuseum.org), is just what the name implies. In 1823, the first licensed pharmacist in the United States, Louis J. Dufilho, Jr., opened an apothecary shop here. Today, you'll find old medicine bottles, voodoo potions, and suppository molds, as well as the old glass cosmetics counter and a jar of leeches, in case you feel the need to be bled. Admission is $5; closed Sunday and Monday.

Constructed from 1795 through 1799 as the Spanish government seat in New Orleans, the **Cabildo,** 701 Chartres St., at Jackson Square (✆ **800/568-6968** or 504/568-6968; http://lsm.crt.state.la.us/cabex.htm), was the site of the signing of the Louisiana Purchase transfer. The building is now the center of the Louisiana State Museum's facilities in the French Quarter, with an exhibition that traces the history of Louisiana from exploration through Reconstruction, covering all aspects of life, including antebellum music, mourning and burial customs, immigrants, and the changing roles of women in the South. Admission is $6; closed Monday.

Also on Jackson Square, the **Presbytère,** 751 Chartres St. (✆ **800/568-6968** or 504/568-6968; http://lsm.crt.state.la.us/presbex.htm), was planned as housing for clergy, but is now a Mardi Gras museum that traces the history of the annual event, with everything from elaborate Mardi Gras Indian costumes to Rex Queen jewelry from the turn of the 20th century on display. A re-creation of a float allows you to pretend you're throwing beads to a crowd on a screen in front of you. Admission is $6; closed Monday.

In the Warehouse District, just west of the Quarter, the **National D-Day Museum,** 945 Magazine St. (✆ **504/527-6012;** www.ddaymuseum.org), was the creation of historian Stephen Ambrose, telling the story of all U.S. amphibious assaults worldwide on that fateful day. Many of the artifacts on display emphasize personal stories, including audio exhibits that tell the experiences of soldiers and civilians alike. Admission is $14.

Aside from the Quarter, the one other neighborhood that absolutely deserves your attention is the **Garden District,** one of the city's most picturesque areas. It's mostly residential, but what residences! Bounded by St. Charles Avenue and Magazine Street between Jackson and Louisiana avenues, the whole district was originally the site of a plantation, and the land was eventually subdivided and developed as a residential neighborhood for wealthy Americans. Throughout the mid–19th century, developers built the Victorian, Italianate, and Greek Revival homes that still line the streets. Take the **St. Charles streetcar** from the French Quarter for the full effect (see "Getting Around," above).



CRUISE TERMINAL 1 & 25 (inset)

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And then, of course, there are the dead: Because New Orleans has always been prone to flooding, bodies have been interred aboveground since its earliest days, sometimes in very elaborate tombs that are definitely worth a visit. **St. Louis Cemetery No. 1,** on Basin Street between Conti and St. Louis streets, at the top of the French Quarter, is the oldest extant cemetery (1789) and the most iconic. The acid-dropping scene from *Easy Rider* was shot here, prompting the city to declare that no film would ever, ever, ever be shot again in one of its cemeteries. In the Garden District, **Lafayette Cemetery No. 1,** 1427 Sixth St. (right across the street from Commander's Palace Restaurant), is another old cemetery that's been beautifully restored. Though both are usually full of tourists during the day, you should still exercise caution when visiting, as they've had some crime over the years.

SHOPPING

Despite what you may think while taking your first walk down **Bourbon Street,** there's more to New Orleans shopping than cheap T-shirts, alligator snow globes, and other souvenir items—although there are plenty of those, too, along with an absolutely mind-boggling selection of **hot sauces.**

On Decatur Street across from Jackson Square, the **French Market** (www.frenchmarket.org) has shops selling candy, cookware, fashion, crafts, toys, New Orleans memorabilia, and candles. There's a lot of kitsch, but some good buys are mixed in, and it's always fun to stroll through and grab a few beignets at **Café du Monde** (see "Dining & Nightlife," below). The French Market is open daily from 9am to 6pm; Café du Monde is open 24 hours.

From Camp Street down to the river on Julia Street, you'll find many of the city's best **contemporary art galleries.** Of course, some of the works are a bit pricey, but there are good deals to be had if you're collecting, and fine art to be seen if you're not.

Magazine Street is the Garden District's premier shopping street, with many antiques stores, art galleries, boutiques, and crafts shops among the 19th-century brick storefronts and cottages.

WHERE TO STAY

In the Garden District, the **McKendrick-Breaux House,** 1474 Magazine St. (✆ **888/570-1700** or 504/586-1700; www.mckendrick-breaux.com), was built at the end of the Civil War by a wealthy plumber and Scottish immigrant. Today, it's one of the best guesthouses for value. It's been completely restored to its original charming state, and each room is furnished with antiques, family collectibles, and fresh flowers. Rates: from $145.

In the French Quarter, the **Hotel Villa Convento,** 616 Ursulines St., between Royal and Chartres (✆ **504/522-1793;** www.villaconvento.com), is incredibly New Orleans, occupying an 1830s Creole town house that, they say, was the original House of the Rising Sun bordello. Inside, the decor is guesthouse cozy, with some rooms opening onto the tropical patio and others to the street. Many have balconies. Rates: from $99.

At the other end of the spectrum, the Quarter's **Omni Royal Orleans,** 621 St. Louis St., between Royal and Chartres streets (✆ **800/843-6664** or 504/529-5333; www.omnihotels.com), is an elegant hotel whose lobby is a small sea of marble, and whose rooms are sizable and elegant, full of muted tones and plush furniture. Windows allow views out over the Quarter. Service varies, but can be exceptional. Rates: from $199.

In the Central Business District, just outside the French Quarter and close to the cruise ship terminal, the **International House,** 221 Camp St., just west of Canal (✆ **800/633-5770** or 504/553-9550; www.ihhotel.com), is a modern, minimalist hotel housed in an old Beaux Arts bank building. Rooms are simple, with high ceilings, ceiling fans, modern bathrooms, dataports, Wi-Fi, CD players with CDs, and photos and knickknacks that remind you that you're in New Orleans. It's all corridors, dark and chic. Rates: from $179.

Also in the Central Business District, the **Windsor Court Hotel,** 300 Gravier St. (✆ **888/596-0955** or 504/523-6000; www.windsorcourthotel.com), is consistently named to lists of America's top hotels, so feel free to hold it to a high standard. Accommodations are exceptionally spacious and classy, with large bay windows or a private

balcony overlooking the river or the city. Downstairs, two corridors display original 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-century art. A plush reading area with international newspapers is on the second floor. Rates: from $370.

About 7 blocks from the cruise ship terminal is the atmospheric **Hotel Monteleone,** 214 Royal St., between Iberville and Bienville streets (✆ **800/535-9595** or 504/523-3341; www.hotelmonteleone.com), the oldest hotel in the city and the largest one in the French Quarter, and it boasts an exceptionally helpful staff. Because of its size, you can almost always get a reservation here, even when other places are booked. Decor and floor layouts are slightly different in each of the rooms, so ask to see a few different ones. Rates: from $279.

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

New Orleans has always essentially been one giant restaurant and nightlife spot. In 1997, a U.S. survey named it "the fattest city in the country," which makes sense once you've tasted the food. After dinner, be sure to head out to the clubs—this is, after all, the city that gave birth to jazz. Many of the best restaurants and clubs are in the French Quarter.

For oysters, head to the **Acme Oyster House,** 724 Iberville St. (✆ **504/522-5973;** www.acmeoyster.com). It's the quarter's oldest oyster bar, a noisy, crowded place where you can shoot your freshly shucked half-shell oysters at the bar or order them in a po' boy sandwich. A dozen will cost you $11; po' boys are $8 to $12.

In business since 1918 and still mighty fine, the legendary **Arnaud's,** 813 Bienville St. (✆ **504/523-5433;** www.arnauds.com), is set in three interconnected, once-private houses from the 1700s. The restaurant's three Belle Epoque dining rooms are lush with Edwardian embellishments. Especially delicious menu items include the signature appetizer, shrimp Arnaud (boiled shrimp topped with a spicy rémoulade sauce), as well as the crabmeat Ravigotte, the charbroiled oysters, the snapper Pontchartrain, the filet mignon, and the classic bananas Foster dessert. Dinner main courses: $24 to $40.

Bacco, 310 Chartres St., between Bienville and Conti streets (✆ **504/522-2426;** www.bacco.com), a great New Orleans bistro, has an elegant setting of pink faux-marble floors and Venetian chandeliers. At night it's romantic and candlelit, while at lunchtime it's more affordable and casual. The menu changes regularly, but always features rich, arresting Italian and Creole creations, many with fresh local seafood. Dinner main courses: $20 to $34.

Galatoire's, 209 Bourbon St., at Iberville Street (✆ **504/525-2021;** www.galatoires.com), feels like a bistro in turn-of-the-20th-century Paris, and is one of the city's most venerable restaurants, run by the same family since 1905 and served by waiters who've been here for decades. Don't come expecting cutting-edge cuisine. Do come expecting a nice piece of perfectly prepared fish—perhaps the red snapper or redfish topped with sautéed crabmeat meunière. Tradition rules. Dinner main courses: $18 to $39.

Not far outside the Quarter, **Mother's Restaurant,** 401 Poydras St., at Tchoupitoulas Street (✆ **504/523-9656;** www.mothersrestaurant.net), has long lines and zero atmosphere, but damn, those po' boys! Customers have been flocking here since 1938 for homemade biscuits and red-bean omelets at breakfast, po' boys at lunch, and soft-shell crabs and jambalaya at dinner. Everything is between $5 and $21.

Napoleon House, 500 Chartres St., at St. Louis Street (✆ **504/524-9752;** www.napoleonhouse.com), would allegedly have been the home of the lieutenant himself if some locals' wild plan to bring him here to live out his exile had panned out.

Instead, it's now a restaurant and bar serving large portions of traditional New Orleans food (po' boys, jambalaya, muffuletta) plus wild-card items like pita and hummus. Sandwiches: $6 to $8.

Right on the border of the French Quarter, the open kitchen at **Palace Café,** 605 Canal St., between Royal and Chartres streets (✆ **504/523-1661;** www.palacecafe.com), serves contemporary Creole food with a big emphasis on seafood: catfish pecan meunière, andouille-crusted fish of the day, and lots more. Don't miss the white-chocolate bread pudding. Dinner main courses: $17 to $34.

Outside the quarter, at the corner of Washington Avenue and Coliseum Street in the Garden District, **Commander's Palace,** 1403 Washington Ave. (✆ **504/899-8221;** www.commanderspalace.com), sustained serious Katrina damage and required a major renovation, but now it's back, and it still reigns as one of the finest dining choices not only in New Orleans, but also in the whole United States. The cuisine is haute Creole. Try anything with Gulf fish, or the Mississippi quail, or . . . oh hell, just try anything. Dinner main courses: $29 to $42.

In the Mid City/Esplanade area, **Dooky Chase,** 2301 Orleans Ave. (✆ **504/821-0600;** www.dookychaserestaurant.com), is a legendary little place run by eponymous octogenarians Dooky and Leah Chase, who spent a year living in a FEMA trailer after Hurricane Katrina, struggling to reopen their flood-damaged restaurant. It's back now, and once again serves the city's best gumbo (which Leah served to Barack Obama when he visited in February 2008), along with fabulous local art on the walls. Dinner main courses: $10 to $17.

For a snack anytime of the day or night, visit **Café du Monde,** 800 Decatur St., right on the river (✆ **504/581-2914;** www.cafedumonde.com). It's basically a 24-hour coffee shop that specializes in beignets, which are square doughnuts served hot and drowned in powdered sugar. It's a great spot for people-watching, but if you don't want to wait for a table, you can always get a bag of beignets to go. Grab lots of napkins, too. Moist towelettes would also help, or maybe just a big wet towel.

Life in the Big Easy has always been conducive to all manner of nighttime entertainment, usually raucous, and that spirit is still more or less intact post-Katrina. Do what most people do: Start at one end of **Bourbon Street** (say, around Iberville St.), walk down to the other end, and then turn around and do it again. Along the way, you'll hear R&B, blues, and jazz pouring out of dozens of bars; be beckoned by numerous strip clubs; and see one tiny little storefront stall after another sporting hand-lettered signs that say OUR BEER IS CHEAPER THAN NEXT DOOR. It's a scene. Bacchanalian? Sorta. Will you spend time in purgatory for it? Not likely, and it's loads of fun. Grab yourself a big cheap beer or one of the famous rum-based Hurricanes and join the party.

Most of the places in this section have a cover charge that varies depending on who's performing; some are free.

The famous **Preservation Hall,** 726 St. Peter St., just off Bourbon (✆ **504/522-2841;** www.preservationhall.com), is a deliberately shabby little hall with very few places to sit and no air-conditioning. Still, crowds show up nearly every night to hear older and younger jazz men and women playing classic jazz amplified by nothing but passion. Admission is $10.

Close by, **Maison Bourbon,** 641 Bourbon St. (✆ **504/522-8818**), presents authentic and often fantastic Dixieland and traditional jazz. Stepping into the brick-walled room, or even just peering in from the street, takes you away from the mayhem outside. There's a one-drink minimum.

If you're looking to get away from the Bourbon Street scene and hear some real brass-band jazz, head up to **Donna's,** 800 N. Rampart St., at the top of St. Ann Street (✆ **504/596-6914;** www.donnasbarandgrill.com). There's no better place to hear the authentic sounds that made New Orleans famous. The cover varies, but is always reasonable.

One block beyond Esplanade, on the periphery of the French Quarter, the jazz bistro **Snug Harbor,** 626 Frenchman St. (✆ **504/949-0696;** www.snugjazz.com), is a classic spot to hear modern jazz in a cozy setting. Sometimes R&B combos and blues are added to the program. There's a full dinner menu in the restaurant, but only appetizers are served in the club.

Other nightlife options include the nostalgia-laden bar and concert hall **Tipitina's,** way out in Uptown at 501 Napoleon Ave. (✆ **504/891-8477;** www.tipitinas.com), where jazz, blues, and Dixieland pour out the doors nightly; and **House of Blues,** 225 Decatur St. (✆ **504/529-2583;** www.hob.com/venues/clubvenues/neworleans), one of the city's largest live-music venues, with several bars and a restaurant on-site.

12 New York City, New York

What can you say that hasn't already been said about the capital of the world? New York is just *it:* the biggest, loudest, and most historic city in the U.S., with a population that encompasses people from every country, race, religion, and social predilection on the face of the earth. It's the melting pot done up in concrete, steel, and glass, with a few patches of green that stand out like moss on a chessboard. And it even looks like a chessboard: From the near-perfect grid of Manhattan's streets and the vertical lines of the skyscrapers to its direct, no-nonsense speaking style, New York is a city of straight lines. And why not? A straight line is, after all, the fastest way to get to the point.

GETTING TO NEW YORK CITY & THE PORT

New York is served by three different cruise ports: one in Manhattan, one in Brooklyn, and another in Bayonne, New Jersey, just across the Hudson.

Manhattan's historic if utilitarian **New York Cruise Terminal** (✆ **212/246-5450;** www.nycruiseterminal.com) is stretched out between the Hudson River and the West Side Highway, between 46th and 54th streets (enter via the vehicle ramp at 55th St.). It's frequently congested on turnaround days when ships debark and embark, though improvements in the works promise to reduce roadway congestion and improve passenger circulation. Parking is available for $30 a day. Just across the highway, near the corner of 46th Street, **H&H Bagels** (www.hhbagels.net) sells the best bagels in New York, hands down, while a block inland, at 11th Avenue and 46th Street, is the **Landmark Tavern** (✆ **212/247-2562;** www.thelandmarktavern.org), one of the most beautiful and historic bars in New York. When it opened in 1868, it was on the waterfront, meaning everything between it and your ship is landfill created over the past century or so.

Down in the old blue-collar neighborhood of Red Hook, the **Brooklyn Cruise Terminal** (✆ **718/246-2794;** www.nycruiseterminal.com) is just across New York Harbor from Lower Manhattan and Governors Island, former site of the country's largest Coast Guard base. The port is easily accessible to locals driving by car, as well as to visitors flying into Kennedy, LaGuardia, and Newark airports. While Red Hook itself is industrial and gritty (if slowly gentrifying), it's just minutes from picturesque

New York City

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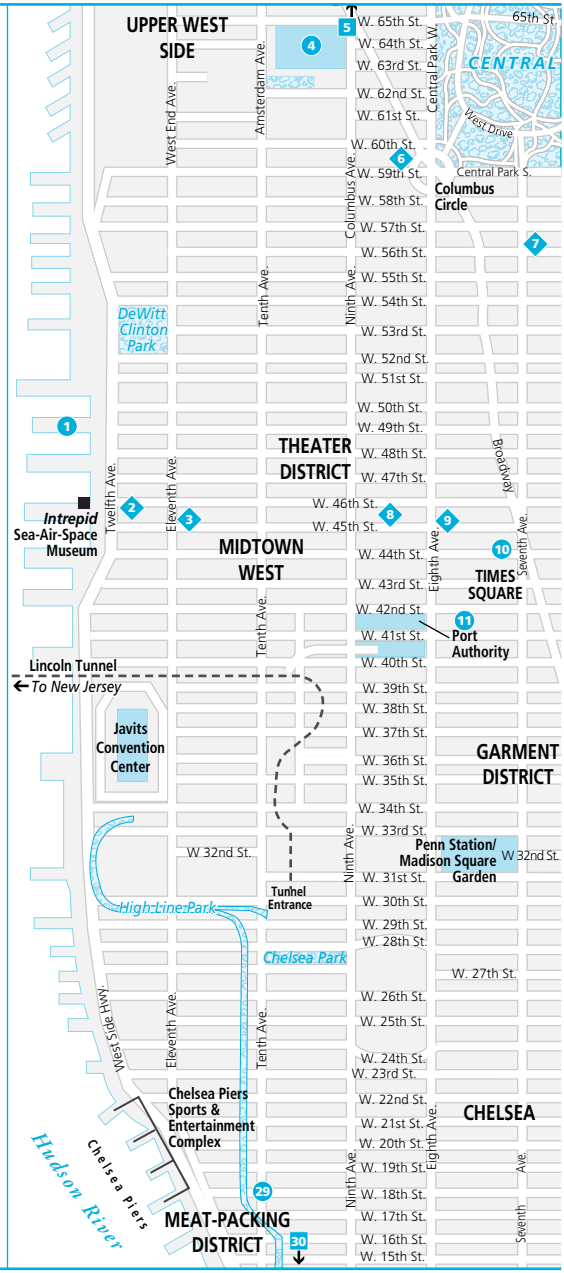

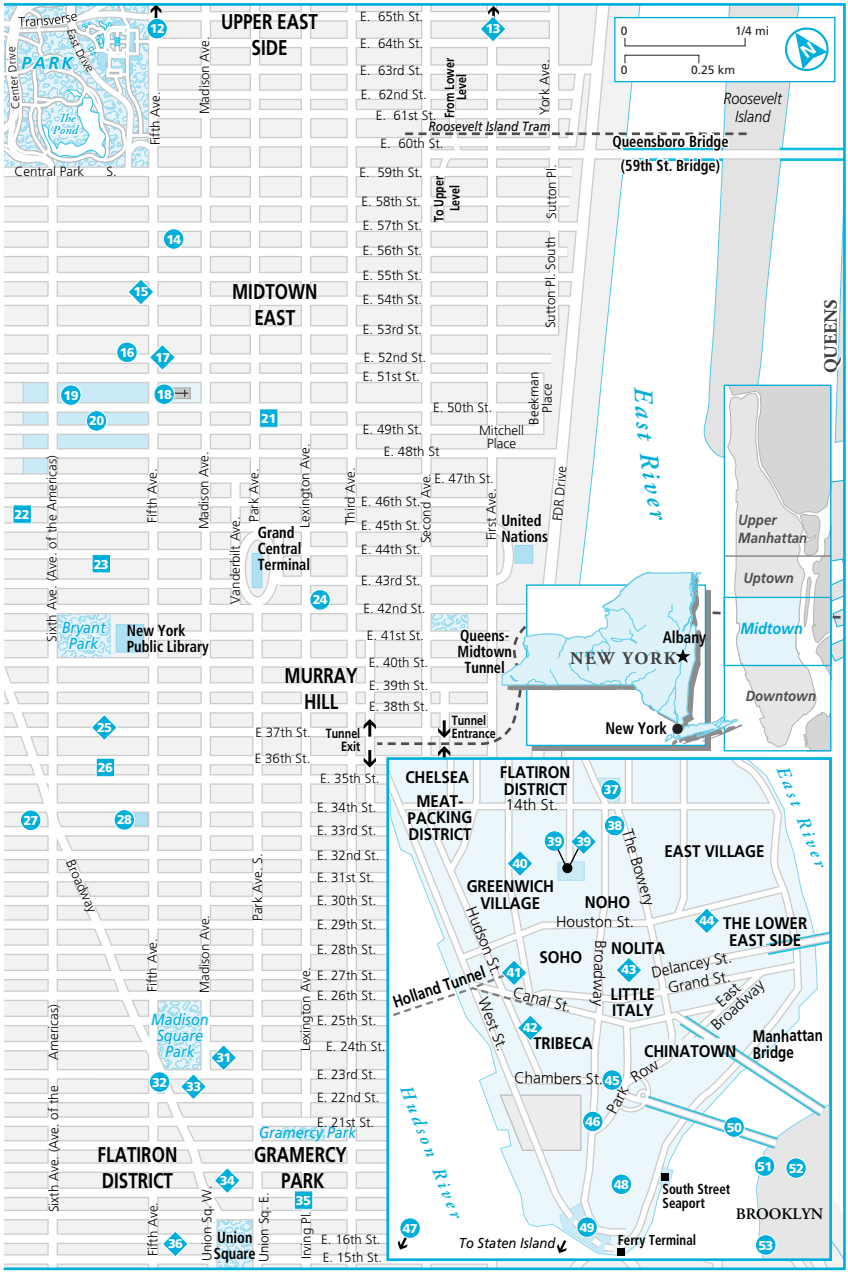
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MIDTOWN EAST
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FLATIRON DISTRICT
GRAMERCY PARK
CHELSEA
MEAT-PACKING DISTRICT
FLATIRON DISTRICT
14th St.
GREENWICH VILLAGE
NOHO
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New York Public Library
Bryant Park
Madison Square Park
Gramercy Park
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Tunnel Exit
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Central Park
Transverse
East Drive
Center Drive
The Pond
Mitchell Place
Beekman Place
Sutton Pl.
Sutton Pl. South
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To Upper Level
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First Ave.
Second Ave.
Third Ave.
Lexington Ave.
Park Ave.
Park Ave. S.
Madison Ave.
Fifth Ave.
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Broadway
Vanderbilt Ave.
FDR Drive
Irving Pl.
Union Sq. W.
Union Sq. E.
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Colonial-era Brooklyn Heights and the great expanse of the **Brooklyn Bridge.** The Brooklyn terminal's most high-profile ship is the *Queen Mary 2,* which berths here on the western end of her transatlantic crossings. From wherever you're driving, get onto the Brooklyn–Queens Expressway and exit at Hamilton Avenue (exit 26) onto the service road. Stay to the left and make a left U-turn at the intersection of Hamilton with Clinton Street/Ninth Street, then continue west along the westbound Hamilton Avenue service road. Take the service road to its end at Van Brunt Street. Turn left, travel 2 blocks, and then turn right onto Bowne Street to enter the terminal. Parking is $20 per day.

In Bayonne, New Jersey, the **Cape Liberty Cruise Port** (✆ **201/823-3737;** www.cruiseliberty.com) opened in 2004 as a home port for Royal Caribbean and Celebrity vessels. We know: Sailing from Bayonne doesn't sound as romantic as sailing from Manhattan, but Cape Liberty does have the advantage of being less congested. And where else can you get a view of the Statue of Liberty's butt? Located just off the New Jersey Turnpike and I-278, and approximately 15 minutes from the Newark airport, this port is easily accessible to those coming from New Jersey, Long Island, and the New York boroughs of Brooklyn and Staten Island. From the New Jersey Turnpike, take exit 14A and follow signs for Rte. 440 South. Follow 440 to Cape Liberty Terminal Boulevard, which will be on your left. Parking is $19 per day.

If you're coming in by plane, you'll fly into one of three New York–area airports. **John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK)** is in southern Queens, about 15 miles southeast of Midtown Manhattan. **LaGuardia Airport (LGA)** is in northern Queens, about 8 miles northeast of Midtown Manhattan. **Newark Liberty International Airport (EWR)** is in Essex and Union counties, New Jersey, about 16 miles southwest of Midtown Manhattan. For information on all three, go to the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey website at **www.panynj.gov**. Kennedy and Newark are the larger airports and accommodate both domestic and international flights. If you've arranged air transportation and/or transfers through your cruise line, a representative will direct you to shuttle buses that take you to whichever port your ship is sailing from. **Yellow taxis** are usually lined up in great numbers at the airports and can take you to any port or your hotel, though the fare will be stiff. From JFK to Manhattan, yellow taxis charge a flat fee of $45 per carload, plus tolls and tip. From Newark to Manhattan, flat fees vary from $40 to $60, depending on where you're going. There is no flat fee from LaGuardia—you pay the standard metered rate: $2.50 just to get going, then 40¢ for every ⅕-mile (about 4 blocks) thereafter, with additional surcharges for peak hours (4–8pm Mon–Fri) and after 8pm. **Super Shuttle** (✆ **212/258-3826;** www.supershuttle.com) is a cheaper shared-van alternative, costing about $21 for the first passenger and $12 for each additional one to Manhattan's terminal. You can (and probably should) make reservations for Super Shuttle in advance.

GETTING AROUND The beauty of New York City is that it's so walkable and so relatively compact, with the island of Manhattan measuring only about 2 miles wide by 13 miles long—and most visitors stick to its lower half anyway. Most of its streets (north of Greenwich Village, at least) follow an unvarying grid pattern, so it's next to impossible to lose your way. The Manhattan cruise terminal is close to the heart of Midtown, about a mile west of Times Square.

If you don't care to walk everywhere, don't hesitate to take the **subway** or **bus.** The per-ride fare is $2.25. You can go anywhere in the city for that one fare. The system works on stored-fare **MetroCard** passes, which are available in any denomination at

any subway station. If you'll be riding a lot, you can also get a **1-day Fun Pass** that's good for unlimited rides from first use until 3am the following day. It costs $8.25. If you'll be in town longer, a 7-night pass costs $27. If your destination requires you to change to a different bus or subway, no worries: An automatic free transfer between subway and bus or between buses is programmed into the card when you use it. If you're paying your fare in cash (buses only; exact change required), you can ask the driver for a paper transfer.

Most subway lines in Manhattan run north-to-south, though some veer off at unexpected angles. Be sure to pick up a **free map** from a station attendant so you can be sure the subway you're on really goes where you think it does. Buses run both north-south and east-west, with routes marked (usually) at each bus stop. They're generally not fast, but they do offer something the subways don't: a view. Buses accept both MetroCards and coins, but not paper money; most have free bus maps available on board. Route, schedule, and fare info for both subways and buses can be found at **www.mta.info**.

You can also hail one of the city's ubiquitous **yellow cabs.** The meter starts at $2.50 and increases 40¢ every ⅕-mile or 90 seconds, whichever comes first. For an overview of town, you can join one of the red double-decker **Gray Line tour buses** (✆ **800/669-0051** or 212/445-0848; www.coachusa.com/newyorksightseeing) at the Circle Line terminal, just a few steps south of the Manhattan cruise ship piers. A 48-hour hop-on/hop-off pass is $54 for adults, $44 for kids, but there's a steep discount if you buy tickets online, in advance.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Because New York is mostly a port of embarkation, the cruise lines generally offer only a few tour choices, including several **bus tours** ($59–$109, 4–8 hr.). If you've got a day or two in town, though, don't bother: You can see more (and better) on your own.

EXPLORING NEW YORK CITY ON YOUR OWN

There's much more to see and do in New York than we have space for here, so we'll concentrate on some highlights—some big touristy ones, as well as some personal favorites.

MIDTOWN Let's triangulate from **Times Square.** Once the center of New York's entertainment industry, the whole area around 42nd Street and Broadway fell into deep, dark, sleazy blight starting in the 1960s and running right up to the early '90s. Back then, you couldn't walk through without being offered heroin, switchblades, or porn. Now, it's a corporate America theme park, overseen by the eight-story **NASDAQ** video screen (the world's largest) at 43rd Street and Broadway, nested in among acres of other high-tech signage. Even at midnight, the whole area is bright as noon and packed with visitors, musicians, and street artists—but not many New Yorkers. The fact is, it's a total tourist trap, but it sure is a sight to behold.

At 44th Street, ABC's ***Good Morning America*** has set up a street-facing studio, while **MTV** has done the same across Broadway at 45th Street, drawing busloads of fans. A couple of blocks away, the former porn-peddler's paradise of **42nd Street** between Seventh and Eighth avenues has been rebuilt into a family-oriented entertainment mecca. In addition to a spate of beautifully renovated theaters—including the **New Victory,** the **New Amsterdam,** and the Selwyn (aka the **American Airlines Theatre**)—the neon-bright block is chock-full with retail shops and amusements, including two huge movie-theater complexes and **Madame Tussaud's New York,** 234 W. 42nd St. (✆ **800/246-8872;** www.nycwax.com), a six-floor, new-world version of London's famous wax museum. Admission is $35 adults, $28 kids.

Just a few blocks east, running from 48th to 50th streets between Fifth and Sixth avenues, the Art Deco buildings of **Rockefeller Center** make you feel like you're standing in a classic 1930s movie. For a dramatic approach, start at Fifth Avenue between 49th and 50th streets, where a promenade leads to the Lower Plaza, home to the famous ice-skating rink in winter and alfresco dining in summer. All around, the flags of United Nations member countries flap in the breeze. In December and early January, this is also the site of the city's official Christmas tree. **St. Patrick's Cathedral** (✆ **212/753-2261;** www.saintpatrickscathedral.org), one of the city's most imposing churches, is on the other side of Fifth Avenue, at 50th Street. Three blocks away, the **Museum of Modern Art,** 11 W. 53rd St., between Fifth and Sixth avenues (✆ **212/708-9400;** www.moma.org), is one of the world's great modern art museums. Admission is $20; closed Tuesday.

From Midtown you have two main choices: Head uptown or head downtown.

UPTOWN To the north, starting at 59th Street, is **Central Park** (www.centralparknyc.org). Laid out between 1859 and 1870 on a design by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, the park's 843 acres are, by virtue of their continued existence amid some of the world's priciest real estate, New York's greatest marvel. Highlights include the Wollman Memorial Ice Rink, the Bethesda Fountain, the Sheep Meadow (a huge sunbathing spot in summer), and the old carousel with its 58 handcarved horses. West of the park, the **Upper West Side** is one of the city's most beautiful residential neighborhoods, its most scenic stretch running from 59th Street north to about 89th Street. On the park's eastern edge, along Fifth Avenue between 82nd and 104th streets, is **Museum Mile,** home to the **Metropolitan Museum of Art,** at 82nd Street (✆ **212/535-7710;** www.metmuseum.org), and eight other museums. The Met is one of the country's largest and best museums, with a collection of more than two million works spanning the globe and the ages. Admission is $20; closed Mondays. Other museums in the area include the **Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,** at Fifth Avenue and 88th Street (✆ **212/423-3500;** www.guggenheim.org), with its landmark seashell design by Frank Lloyd Wright, its collection spanning the late 19th century to the present, and a rotating series of near buildingwide temporary exhibitions. Admission is $18; closed Thursday.

DOWNTOWN & BROOKLYN Heading downtown from the Times Square area will take you eventually to New York's most historic districts, where the original colony of New Amsterdam got its start. From the corner of Broadway and 42nd Street, look east. That tall building with the gleaming stainless-steel spire is the **Chrysler Building,** the city's most beautiful skyscraper. Walk toward it, stopping when you get to Fifth Avenue. Look south from here and start walking toward that other big spire ahead of you, the **Empire State Building** (www.esbnyc.com), which sits at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 34th Street. Following the 2001 destruction of the World Trade Center, it's once again the tallest building in Manhattan. Lines to get up to the 86th-floor observatory can be horrible at the concourse-level ticket booth, so be prepared to wait—or consider purchasing advance tickets online. Admission is $18 adults, $17 seniors and youth ages 12 to 17, and $13 kids ages 6 to 11. You can also shell out $42 for an express ticket that lets you bypass the lines. At the observatory, you can walk out on the windy deck and look through coin-operated viewers (bring quarters) over what, on a clear day, can be as much as an 80-mile visible radius.

Back on the street, head downtown on Fifth Avenue. Where it crosses Broadway at 23rd Street, you'll see the famous **Flatiron Building** from 1902, looking like the prow

of a ship. Walk south along Broadway past **Union Square,** site of protest rallies from the 1870s through today. At Broadway and 10th, **Grace Church** was designed by James Renwick, Jr., who later designed St. Patrick's. At Waverly Place, turn right and go 1 block to **Washington Square Park,** a **Greenwich Village** landmark typically full of musicians and other street performers. Meander through (and maybe take a side trip west into the warren of narrow, cozy streets that make up the Village), then walk south on LaGuardia Place past Houston Street and into **SoHo.** Once the city's main arts neighborhood, it's now a center for fashion and design. Give your credit cards to a designated driver.

Après shopping, walk east to Broadway and catch the downtown R train at either Prince or Canal Street. Get off at Court Street/Borough Hall and exit at the rear of the platform. Ta da! You're in **Brooklyn,** the Borough of Kings. Walk west on Montague Street. This is the heart of **Brooklyn Heights,** a Colonial-era village that's now a protected historic district. Wander off on some of the tree-lined side streets to see beautiful 19th-century homes. At the end of Montague, the **Brooklyn Heights Promenade** offers the most spectacular Manhattan view there is, bar none. To the right, that gorgeous span between the two islands is the **Brooklyn Bridge,** completed in 1883. When built, it was the largest suspension bridge in the world, its two stone towers dwarfing every other structure in the city. To New Yorkers, it's as much a marvel now as then, because even though larger bridges exist, few are as graceful and beautiful.

The best way to see the bridge is to walk it, and that's what you're going to do next. Walk to the end of the Promenade, up the ramp, past Cranberry Street and the playground, and go through the alley to Middagh Street. Take that about three blocks, crossing Cadman Plaza West into the park, where it curves around to the left and eventually runs under an overpass. There, look for the stone stairway on your left up to the **Brooklyn Bridge footpath.** The bridge is about 1¼ miles long, with historical plaques on its two towers and the magnificence of New York all around.

Back in Manhattan, the bridge lets you off facing **City Hall** and its surrounding park. On the far side, the 1910 **Woolworth Building** was the tallest building in the world until the Chrysler Building beat it out in 1929, and it remains one of New York's most beautiful. Farther down Broadway, at Fulton Street, **St. Paul's Chapel** is New York's oldest church, built in 1766. George Washington prayed here on inauguration day 1789, and in 2001 it served as a refuge for 9/11 rescue workers. Thousands of small memorials left by mourners are preserved inside, along with other displays. The **World Trade Center site,** with its constant bustle of slow-motion rebuilding, is just behind the church's graveyard.

Walk south to narrow little **Wall Street.** On the corner, **Trinity Church** was founded in 1697, with the present structure dating from 1846. Its small cemetery holds the graves of Alexander Hamilton and other great New Yorkers. One block down Wall is the unprepossessing entrance to the **New York Stock Exchange.** Go to the corner on Broad Street for the more ceremonial view. Next door, a statue of George Washington marks the entrance to **Federal Hall,** a reminder that the first seat of U.S. government was at this location, from 1789 to 1790. In true New York fashion, it was demolished in 1812 to make room for something newer.

At the very tip of Manhattan, **Battery Park** and the streets around were where the Dutch first settled "New Amsterdam" in 1625. The park's centerpiece, **Castle Clinton,** began as a fort during the War of 1812 and later served as New York's immigration facility, welcoming eight million new Americans between 1855 and 1890. You

The High Line: Turning History into the Future

In 2009, New York reinvented a once abandoned elevated rail line as a new public park, and in the process gave residents and visitors a whole new way of seeing the city.

The High Line dates to 1929, when it was built as a way to get freight from the city's docks to the industries along the west side. All told, it wound its way 36 blocks south from 35th Street to Clarkson, spanning streets on iron bridges strong enough to support two fully loaded trains, and passing directly through a number of buildings to allow for easy transfer of materials. As New York's port business gradually shifted to New Jersey between the 1950s and 1970s, the High Line fell into disuse, and by the 1980s it was an overgrown relic of the city's industrial past—and that's where the story started getting interesting. Over the decades, Mother Nature began working on the High Line, planting it with wind-blown seeds and creating whole ecosystems along its length. By the late 1990s, it was essentially a long, narrow wilderness, forgotten by all except the few who climbed its supports and braved its barbed-wire barricades. One resident had his Christmas tree on it for years, its lights powered by an extension cord from his apartment. By 2002, a preservation movement founded by artists and community activists had convinced new mayor Mike Bloomberg to preserve the structure, and by 2006 plans had been drawn up to turn the High Line into a major new public space.

The first section of the park, running from fashionable Gansevoort Street (the line's southern terminus after several blocks of it were demolished in 1991) to 20th Street, opened in June 2009. Enter at either end and you'll be on a 1.45-mile path of smooth concrete planks that snakes 30 feet above the streets, dotted with benches, a few photogenic sections of track, and beds of grasses, trees, and other greenery that mimic the environment Mother Nature created during the line's years of disuse. Sculptors and other artists will eventually create site-specific works as part of an emerging artists program, linking the park with the city's arts community. (Chelsea, the neighborhood through which the park runs, is also the city's gallery district.)

The park's second phase, from 20th to 30th streets, is expected to open in 2010, with the final loop that curves toward the Hudson being finished at a later date.

can see its more famous successor, **Ellis Island,** from the waterside, adjacent to the **Statue of Liberty.** Ferries (✆ **877/523-9849;** www.statuecruises.com) sail to both between 9am and 3pm, with tickets costing $12 for adults, $5 for kids 4 to 12, but you'll have to get there early and be prepared to wait in line. You can also buy ferry tickets in advance, online.

SHOPPING

Almost every block in New York City has some interesting shop on it, from up-up-upmarket boutiques to funky little joints. Here's a quick read: Downtown, along

Canal, Mott, Mulberry, and Elizabeth streets, **Chinatown** is chock-full of shops selling fish and herbal cures—fun for their bustle, exotica, and sometimes downright weirdness. Dispersed among them—especially along **Canal Street**—you'll find a mind-boggling collection of knockoff sunglasses and watches, cheap backpacks, discount leather goods, and exotic souvenirs. A cleaned-up distillation of it all can be found at the **Pearl River** Chinese emporium (www.pearlriver.com), a few blocks north of Canal at 477 Broadway. Going north, **SoHo,** stretching from Broadway east to Sullivan Street, and from Houston down to Broome Street, is still the epicenter of cutting-edge fashion. Going up even farther, **East Ninth Street** between First and Second avenues is lined with a smart collection of boutiques that sell excellent-quality original fashions for women.

At Herald Square (where 34th St., Sixth Ave., and Broadway converge), you'll find **Macy's,** the self-proclaimed world's biggest department store. Go in if only to see the classic wooden escalators that have been running since 1902. At **Times Square,** you can step into the giant **Toys "R" Us** flagship on Broadway and 44th Street, complete with a 60-foot Ferris wheel. West 47th Street between Fifth and Sixth avenues is the city's famous **Diamond District,** with more than 2,600 retail and wholesale diamond and jewelry businesses. **Tiffany & Co.** reigns at Fifth Avenue and 57th Street, with other big-name, big-ticket designers radiating out from the crossroads, including **Versace, Chanel, Dior,** and **Cartier.** You'll also find big-name jewelers in the area, as well as chichi department stores such as **Bergdorf Goodman, Henri Bendel,** and **Saks Fifth Avenue,** all of which help this stretch of Fifth Avenue maintain its ritzy cachet.

WHERE TO STAY

There are tons of choices all over town, with hotel room rates rarely going below $150 a night, and easily running more than $300, $400, or $500—and we're not even getting into the realm of suites and penthouses. That said, there are often special promotional rates on weekends, when business travelers have all left town.

Classic New York hotels have a tendency to charge robber-baron prices. Not so the **Waldorf-Astoria,** 301 Park Ave. (✆ **800/WALDORF** [925-3673]; www.waldorfastoria.com), a bastion of old-school Art Deco elegance with more than 1,000 airy rooms with high ceilings and traditional decor, all at a classy Park Avenue location. Rates: from $239. The **Algonquin,** 59 W. 44th St. (✆ **888/304-2047** or 212/840-6800; www.algonquinhotel.com), is another legendary New York spot, its restaurant once hosting the Algonquin Round Table, a daily luncheon where Dorothy Parker, Robert Benchley, Alexander Woollcott, and other luminaries set the tone for the 1920s literary scene. The hotel makes the most of this association, its small but comfortable rooms stocked with the latest issue of *The New Yorker* and its publike Blue Bar home to a rotating collection of Hirschfeld drawings. Rates: from $285.

With artistic interiors and great service, the **Muse,** 130 W. 46th St. (✆ **877/692-6873** or 212/485-2400; www.themusehotel.com), is a little jewel of the Theater District, with its beautiful contemporary decor, good-size rooms with featherbeds, and sumptuous bathrooms. Rates: from $289. One block south, **Grace Hotel,** 125 W. 45th St. (✆ **212/354-2323;** www.room-matehotels.com), is another of the best moderately priced Midtown options, offering rooms designed with a modern, minimalist aesthetic, plus niceties like a lobby swimming pool with a swim-up bar. Rates: from $209. A little farther south, the **Hotel Metro,** 45 W. 35th St. (✆ **800/356-3870;** www.hotelmetronyc.com), is a Midtown gem that's a surprisingly good deal. Rates: from $180.

In the fashionable Meatpacking District, literally straddling the new High Line Park (p. 440), the **Standard Hotel,** 848 Washington St., at 13th St. (✆ **212/645-4646;** www.standardhotels.com/new-york-city), is überchic, with streamlined modern rooms angled to maximize views of the city, the park, and the Hudson River just 1 block away. Rates: from $345.

Nestled into the residential Upper West Side, the **Lucerne,** 201 W. 79th St. (✆ **800/492-8122** or 212/875-1000; www.thelucernehotel.com), occupies a landmark 1904 building with a magnificent terra-cotta exterior, and is only a few blocks from the American Museum of Natural History. Inside, its rooms are done in a classic style, with a real New York feel. Rates: from $190. Even more New York is the 12-room **Inn at Irving Place,** 56 Irving Place, at East 17th Street (✆ **800/685-1447** or 212/533-4600; www.innatirving.com). An absolute jewel of a place, it was created from two joined brownstone town houses built in 1834. Outside, only the address on the door gives away its location; inside, it's all 19th century, from the period furnishings and Persian rugs to the old-style New York grace, dignity, and charm. Rates: from $445.

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

You can get any type of cuisine imaginable in this foodie city, from steakhouse and seafood to Chinese and Japanese to Korean, Indian, Thai, Portuguese, Argentinean, German, French, Ethiopian, Tibetan, Burmese . . . you get the picture.

In the lobby of the ornate, Art Deco MetLife building, **Eleven Madison Park,** 11 Madison Ave. (✆ **212/889-0905;** www.elevenmadisonpark.com), serves hearty, French-infused country cuisine in a magnificent, high-ceilinged setting. Three-course prix-fixe dinner: $88. To get even more French, visit **La Grenouille,** 3 E. 52nd St. (✆ **212/752-1495;** www.la-grenouille.com), which serves the classics with elegant perfection. Three-course prix-fixe dinner: $89. Main courses: $43 to $55. In the "best views" category, **Asiate,** 80 Columbus Circle, at 60th Street (✆ **212/805-8881;** www.mandarinoriental.com/newyork), in the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, might steal the show, perched 34 floors above Central Park. The Japanese/French fare is divine. Three-course prix-fixe dinner: $85. If it's Italian you're craving, go downtown to **Babbo,** 110 Waverly Place (✆ **212/777-0303;** www.babbonyc.com), where Food Network chef Mario Batali has created the ideal setting for his exciting northern Italian cooking. Main courses: $24 to $29. For Japanese, try **Nobu,** 105 Hudson St., in TriBeCa (✆ **212/219-0500;** www.myriadrestaurantgroup.com/nobu), which also happens to have a hand in the menus on Crystal Cruise Lines' ships. Main courses: $28 to $42.

In the Theater District, pre-theater diners can't go wrong with **Aquavit,** 65 E. 55th St. (✆ **212/307-7311;** www.aquavit.org), which has a three-course tasting menu of light Scandinavian cuisine for $84. **Joe Allen,** 326 W. 46th St. (✆ **212/581-6464;** www.joeallenrestaurant.com), is the ultimate Broadway pub—and the meatloaf is marvelous. Main courses: $16 to $30. For a steakhouse experience, **Frankie & Johnnie's,** 269 W. 45th St. (✆ **212/997-9494;** www.frankieandjohnnies.com), is a Theater District legend, in business since 1926. The steaks (especially the house sirloin) are extraordinary and the service is old school. A second location, at 32 W. 37th St. (✆ **212/997-8940**), is in a two-story former town house that was once home to legendary actor John Barrymore. Main courses: $25 to $38.

New York's Best Pizza

Is there anything more New York than pizza? Apparently not, because a Google search for the term nets you about 462,000 hits, whereas "New York bagel" scores only some 60,000 and "New York hot dog" gets a measly 1,200. So, there you have it.

Though there are roughly a zillion pizzerias in the naked city (some 47 of them named Ray's, amazingly enough), four stand head and shoulders above the rest. Up at 116th Street in Spanish Harlem, **Patsy's Pizzeria,** 2287 First Ave. (✆ **212/534-9783**), is our favorite. Open since 1933, it recently celebrated its 75th anniversary by rolling prices back to what they were on opening day: 60¢ for a pizza, 40¢ for mussels, 10¢ for a soda, and so on. That was a 1-day deal, but it gives you an idea what kind of place this is: totally traditional, totally historic, friendly, and did we mention delicious? Its pies are fashioned with a slightly sweet sauce, thin and perfectly baked crust, fresh mozzarella melted evenly across the top, fresh basil, and a variety of optional toppings. *Do not* just get a slice from the takeout window. Instead, go in, sit down, and have a pie made for you fresh, served by the consistently friendly staff. Down in Brooklyn, **Grimaldi's,** 19 Old Fulton St. (✆ **718/858-4300;** www.grimaldis.com), was founded by Patsy's nephew in 1990, right in the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge. Its pizza is on a par with Patsy's, but its ambience is less old-time restaurant and more everyday joint—albeit with a big line of tourists outside waiting to get in. Back in Manhattan, **John's of Bleecker Street,** 278 Bleecker St. (✆ **212/243-1680;** www.johnsbrickovenpizza.com), is known for its great crust—not too chewy, not too crispy—with full-spread mozzarella, fresh sauce, and generous toppings. Its interior is woody and lived in, with a tiled floor, muraled walls, and booths and tables covered with decades of carved initials. Finally, down in what remains of once-vibrant Little Italy, **Lombardi's,** 32 Spring St. (✆ **212/941-7994;** www.lombardispizza.com), was founded by Gennaro Lombardi, the immigrant grocer from Naples who allegedly invented the American pizza pie in 1905. Today, it's a bit touristy, but its pizzas are still fine, their smoky crusts slightly blackened and then daubed with warm blobs of fresh mozzarella, tomato sauce, basil, and miscellaneous toppings.

A large pie at any of these places will run you between $12 and $18, without extra toppings. Eat up: It gets no better than this.

Heading downtown, the **Union Square Cafe,** 21 E. 16th St. (✆ **212/243-4020;** www.unionsquarecafe.com), is a perennial favorite, serving new American cuisine in a cheerful setting. Main courses: $26 to $35. Holding the torch for the old Jewish Lower East Side, **Katz's Delicatessen,** 205 E. Houston St. (✆ **212/254-2246;** www.katzdeli.com), is the choice among those who know their kreplach, knishes, and pastramis. The all-beef wieners are legendary in a town known for its dogs. For those keeping score, this is the place where Meg Ryan had her fake orgasm in *When Harry Met Sally.* Main courses: $5 to $19.

For Indian food, Sixth Street between First and Second avenues is an **entire block of inexpensive Indian eats** and over-the-top decor. Just walk down the street and see which of the sidewalk solicitors seems most persuasive. For something fancier, head up to **Tamarind,** 41–43 E. 22nd St. (✆ **212/674-7400;** www.tamarinde22.com), one of the best Indian restaurants in Manhattan, offering innovative and flavorful variations on the old standards. Main courses: $16 to $33.

When it comes to nightlife in New York City, where to start? There's **Broadway** for world-class shows (and the **TKTS** booth in Times Square for cheapish last-minute seats: www.tdf.org/tkts); **Carnegie Hall** (www.carnegiehall.org) and **Lincoln Center** (www.lincolncenter.org) for symphonies, opera, and ballet; **Radio City Music Hall** (www.radiocity.com) for concerts and shows; and the **Blue Note,** at 131 W. Third St. (www.bluenote.net), for jazz. The list goes on. Or you could just barhop. Assuming you have only a day or two to sample the Big Apple, downtown has the most interesting options, such as trendoid lounges in **TriBeCa** and **SoHo,** where a Cosmo goes for the price of a small car. Try old-time downtown pubs such as the **Ear Inn,** 326 Spring St. at Greenwich (✆ **212/226-9060;** www.earinn.com), whose two-story brick home dates to 1817, or the **Old Town Bar & Restaurant,** 45 E. 18th St. between Broadway and Park Ave. (✆ **212/529-6732;** www.oldtownbar.com), which opened in 1892 and boasts a great old mahogany bar and fantastic burgers. If you want a more Woody Allen experience, Second and Third avenues between 72nd and 96th streets have no shortage of bars and restaurants where comfortably well-off uptown intellectuals feel at home, including **Elaine's,** 1703 Second Ave. at 88th Street (✆ **212/534-8103**).

For listings of currents shows, plays, and live music, check out local publications such as ***Time Out New York*** (www.timeoutny.com), the ***Village Voice*** (www.villagevoice.com), ***The New Yorker*** (www.newyorker.com), and ***New York*** magazine (www.nymag.com).

13 Norfolk, Virginia

Founded in 1682 on two peninsulas formed by the Chesapeake Bay and the Elizabeth and Lafayette rivers, Norfolk is a major seaport and naval base that's replaced its old sailor bars with a modern, spotless downtown of high-rise offices, condos, and all the marinas, shops, and museums that go with them. Interspersed are reminders of the city's past, such as historic houses and the old City Hall, now a museum and memorial to World War II hero Gen. Douglas MacArthur (who was actually born in Little Rock, Arkansas, but chose to be buried in Norfolk because his mother's ancestors lived here). **Downtown** is on the southern side of the city, on the north bank of the Elizabeth River. Bordering downtown to the northwest, **Freemason** is Norfolk's oldest residential neighborhood, with most of its 18th- and 19th-century town houses restored as private homes, businesses, and restaurants. You'll still find a few cobblestone streets here. Northwest of Freemason, across a semicircular inlet known as the Hague, **Ghent** was the city's first subdivision (most houses in "old" Ghent, near the Hague and the Chrysler Museum of Art, were built between 1892 and 1912) and is now its trendiest enclave. Norfolk is one of the newer alternative home ports, with ships sailing to the Caribbean, The Bahamas, and Bermuda.

GETTING TO NORFOLK & THE PORT

Norfolk is 190 miles southeast of Washington, D.C., and close to the North Carolina border, making it a convenient port for cruisers in the Mid-Atlantic states. Ships dock

CRUISE TERMINAL 13

ATTRACTIONS & SHOPPING
Chrysler Museum of Art **2**
Fort Norfolk **1**
Freemason Street Reception Center **6**
MacArthur Center **9**
MacArthur Memorial **10**
Moses Myers House **7**
Nauticus/Hampton Roads Naval Museum **12**
St. Paul's Episcopal Church **8**
Willoughby-Baylor House/ Norfolk History Museum **5**

ACCOMMODATIONS
Free Mason Inn B&B **3**
Norfolk Waterside Marriott **15**
Sheraton Norfolk Waterside Hotel **16**

DINING & NIGHTLIFE
Baxter's **4**
Todd Jurich's Bistro **14**
The 219 **11**
The Waterside **17**

at the modern **Half Moone Cruise and Celebration Center,** 111 Waterside Dr., at Main Street (✆ **800/664-1080** or 757/664-1000; www.halfmoone.org), named for a fort built on the site "in the form of a half moone" in the late 17th century. It's just steps from the heart of the city and next door to Nauticus, the National Maritime Center (see "Exploring Norfolk on Your Own," below). If you happen to be flying, you'll land at **Norfolk International Airport (ORF),** on Norview Avenue, 1½ miles north of I-64 (✆ **757/857-3351;** www.norfolkairport.com). The port is about 7 miles away, and you can get there in 20 minutes via **taxi** (about $15 to $20 one-way). Shuttle services and car rentals are also available at the airport.

By car, take I-64, exit onto 264 West toward downtown Norfolk, and take the Waterside Drive exit (exit 9). The terminal is four traffic lights down on the left. There are two different parking areas, both close to the dock, serving different ships. Parking is $10 per day. For more information, check **www.cruisenorfolk.org**.

GETTING AROUND A car is the easiest way to get around this spread-out area, though you can walk the downtown area around the port. Free trolleys operated by **Norfolk Electric Transit** (✆ **757/222-6100;** www.norfolk.gov/visitors/net.asp) are the easiest way to get around downtown. You'll find **car-rental** agencies at the airport. For a taxi, call **Norfolk Checker** (✆ **757/855-3333;** www.norfolkcheckertaxi.com). Rates start at $3, with another $2.10 for each mile thereafter.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Colonial Williamsburg ($69, 6½ hr.): A historical interpreter will guide you through the meticulously restored buildings and cobblestone streets of this 18th-century reconstruction (Williamsburg was the capital of Virginia from 1699 until 1780). After your 1½-hour walking tour, you'll have free time to shop at Merchants Square.

Norfolk & Virginia Beach Highlights ($58, 3 hr.): There's nothing particularly special about this bus tour, but it's a good bet if you want an overview of the city. You visit the MacArthur Memorial, historic lighthouses, and the First Landing Cross at Cape Henry, where English colonists first came ashore in 1607.

EXPLORING NORFOLK ON YOUR OWN

Right at the port, the large gray building is **Nauticus, the National Maritime Center,** 1 Waterside Dr., at Boush Street (✆ **800/664-1080;** www.nauticus.org), a museum dedicated to U.S. naval sea power. The star attraction is the 888-foot USS *Wisconsin,* berthed alongside on the Elizabeth River. A real live battleship, it was built in 1943 and saw duty during World War II, the Korean War, and the 1991 Gulf War. It's once again on inactive reserve status, but because it has to be ready to go within 3 months if called up, the whole ship is hermetically sealed—meaning you can't go inside. You can, however, walk on board and stare up at the enormous 16-inch guns overhanging its teak main deck. When you leave the *Wisconsin,* you'll walk into the **Hampton Roads Naval Museum** (✆ **757/444-8921;** www.hrnm.navy.mil), with exhibits describing the Civil War battle between the ironclads *Monitor* and *Merrimac* out on Hampton Roads, as well as more info on the U.S. Navy's Norfolk history. The **"Nauticus"** part of the complex is a children's museum on the building's third and fourth floors, with hands-on interactive exhibits and theaters. Admission to the naval museum and battleship is free; to Nauticus, it's $11 adults, $8.50 children.

Nearby, the **Waterside** (see "Dining & Nightlife," below) is a general entertainment/shopping/dining area that was one of the first pegs in the revitalization of downtown.

Boats leave from both Nauticus and Waterside for cruises of the harbor. The most charming of these is the ***American Rover*** (✆ **757/627-7245;** www.americanrover.com), a graceful schooner modeled after 19th-century Chesapeake Bay ships. Two-hour cruises cost $14 adults, $8 kids 11 and under; 3-hour cruises are $16 and $10, respectively.

A few blocks inland, in Norfolk's old City Hall, the **MacArthur Memorial,** MacArthur Square between City Hall Avenue and Plume Street, at Bank Street (✆ **757/441-2965;** www.macarthurmemorial.org), is the final resting place of the World War II hero and his wife, Jean, their side-by-side marble crypts resting beneath an enormous dome. In a theater next door, a 22-minute film will give you a perspective on Douglas MacArthur's life and help you understand the other exhibits, which include MacArthur's famous corncob pipe, his omnipresent sunglasses, his field cap with its sides rolled down, and a replica of the plaque marking the spot on the USS *Missouri* where MacArthur presided over the surrender of Japan. Admission is free.

Nearby are two historic homes. The **Moses Myers House,** 331 Bank St., is a handsome early-Federal brick town house built by the first Jews to settle in Norfolk. They arrived in 1787 and built their home 5 years later. Two Gilbert Stuart portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Myers hang in the drawing room, and some 70% of the overall furniture and decorative arts displayed is original. The fireplace has unusual carvings depicting a sun god—with the features of George Washington. A block away, the **Willoughby-Baylor House/Norfolk History Museum,** 601 E. Freemason St., was built in 1794, and the classic example of Georgian- and Federal-style architecture is now the city's official history museum. Both houses are administered by the Chrysler Museum of Art (see below), and tours covering both depart on the hour from the **Freemason Street Reception Center,** between the houses at 401 E. Freemason St. (✆ **800/368-3097**). Admission is free; it's open year-round Wednesday through Saturday from 10am to 4pm, with tours offered on the hour until 3pm. You can also pick up a map at the reception center and it'll guide you around the **Cannonball Trail,** a walk-it-yourself heritage trail that connects historic sites downtown, including the 1739-vintage **St. Paul's Episcopal Church,** 201 St. Paul's Blvd. (✆ **757/627-4353;** www.saintpaulsnorfolk.com), the only pre-Revolutionary structure left in downtown Norfolk.

About a mile to the north, the **Chrysler Museum of Art,** 425 W. Olney Rd., at Mowbray Arch (✆ **757/644-6200;** www.chrysler.org), is Virginia's finest art museum, spanning periods from ancient Egypt to today, with outstanding collections of glass and Art Nouveau furniture, as well as exhibits of ancient Indian, Islamic, Oriental, African, pre-Columbian, French, Italian, and American art and a permanent photo gallery. Admission is $7, free for children 18 and under; closed Monday and Tuesday. While you're in this part of town, drop in to **Fort Norfolk,** 801 Front St. (**www.norfolkhistorical.org/fort**), and make sure you bring a photo ID to do a self-guided tour. It's the only survivor of 19 harborfront forts authorized by President George Washington in 1794, and it helped protect Norfolk during the War of 1812. During the Civil War, Confederate forces seized the fort and used its magazine to supply the ironclad *Merrimac* during its famous battle with the USS *Monitor.* Admission is free; open Monday through Friday from 7am to 6pm.

SHOPPING

Norfolk is one of the better places in Virginia to search for antiques, with more than 30 shops selling a range of furniture, decorative arts, glassware, jewelry, and other items, from both home and overseas. The best place to look is in the old neighborhood of

Ghent (north of the Chrysler Museum of Art), which over the years has transformed from farmland to wealthy residential enclave to bad neighborhood to bohemian center and now to trendy hipville. A number of shops sit along West 21st Street between Colonial Avenue and Granby Street, which also has its own slate of shops.

Downtown Norfolk's centerpiece is the **MacArthur Center,** a $300-million shopping mall built in 1998 and covering the 9 square blocks bordered by Monticello and City Hall avenues, Freemason Street, and St. Paul's Boulevard (✆ **757/627-6000;** www.shopmacarthur.com). The main entry is on Monticello Avenue at Market Street. Anchored by Nordstrom and the largest Dillard's department store in existence, it has most of the mall regulars, an 18-screen cinema, a food court, and full-service restaurants.

WHERE TO STAY

The **Sheraton Norfolk Waterside Hotel,** 777 Waterside Dr. (✆ **888/625-5144** or 757/622-6664; www.sheraton.com), sits next door to the Waterside, overlooking busy Norfolk Harbor. A contemporary 10-story hotel, it has spacious rooms furnished with dark-wood furniture, about a third of them with small balconies facing the river. Rates: from $165.

The **Norfolk Waterside Marriott,** 235 E. Main St. (✆ **800/228-9290;** www.marriott.com), is an elegant, 24-story high-rise connected to the Waterside via covered skywalk. It's got a mahogany-paneled, 18th-century-style lobby and sumptuously furnished guest rooms. The indoor pool opens to a sun deck overlooking the river. Rates: from $209.

Within walking distance of downtown Norfolk, the **Free Mason Inn Bed & Breakfast,** 411 W. York St. (✆ **866/388-1897;** www.freemasoninn.com), is a wonderfully renovated, turn-of-the-20th-century Victorian home. Rooms are decorated in an elegant English motif, with gas fireplaces, poster beds, and luxury linens. Guests enjoy wine and cheese before dinner in the parlor. Rates: from $145.

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

At Boush Street, opposite the port and Nauticus, **Todd Jurich's Bistro,** 150 Main St. (✆ **757/622-3210;** www.toddjurichsbistro.com), is one of this region's very best restaurants. It offers creative twists on Southern traditions, such as all-lump-meat crab cakes on brioche with lemon mayonnaise. Everything's made with fresh produce, drawn whenever possible from local farms that practice ecologically sound agriculture. Main courses: $20 to $36.

Norfolk's downtown renaissance has turned **Granby Street** between Main and Charlotte streets into the town's "Restaurant Row," with a number of notable eateries. **The 219,** appropriately at 219 Granby St. (✆ **757/627-2896**), was a pioneer in downtown's renaissance and is still Granby Street's top restaurant. In fact, its crab cakes are among the best in all of Norfolk. Asian flavors crop up here, too, as in the napa snapper—red snapper with napa cabbage in a lemon grass broth. You also can opt for one-person pizzas with usual and unusual toppings. There's always a vegetarian selection such as tofu fried in a spicy chili-and-garlic sauce. Main courses: $15 to $21.

For a little after-dinner nightlife (or casual dinner, for that matter), try the **Waterside Festival Marketplace** (aka "the Waterside"), between Waterside Drive and the Elizabeth River (✆ **757/627-3300;** www.watersidemarketplace.com). This was the catalyst for downtown Norfolk's revitalization, and though the MacArthur Center has eclipsed it as a shopping mecca, it's still an after-dark dining-and-entertainment destination, with bars, comedy clubs, restaurants, and live music. You can catch all the

ball games at **Baxter's Sports Lounge,** 500 Granby St. (✆ **757/622-9837;** www.baxterssportslounge.homestead.com), a monstrous sports bar with pool tables and good pub fare.

14 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Philadelphia today is a vibrant mix of old and new. The United States' sixth-largest metropolis has the largest surviving district of original Colonial homes and shops in the country. Philadelphia's Independence National Historical Park is part of the most historic square mile in America, the place where the United States was conceived, declared, and ratified. The city's Center City (or downtown section) is a stroller's paradise of restored Georgian and Federal structures integrated with smart shops and contemporary row-house courts to create a working urban environment. Today, Philadelphia is a center of professional and amateur sports, with more than 9,800 acres of parkland within the city limits. Home to some of the best dining values and some of the finest restaurants in America, the city is filled with art, crafts, and music for every taste, with boulevards made for street fairs and parades all year long. From its row-house boutiques to the Second Continental Congress's favorite tavern, from an Ivy League campus to street artists and musicians, from gleaming skyscrapers to the gritty Italian Market, Philadelphia embodies the American dream, from start to future.

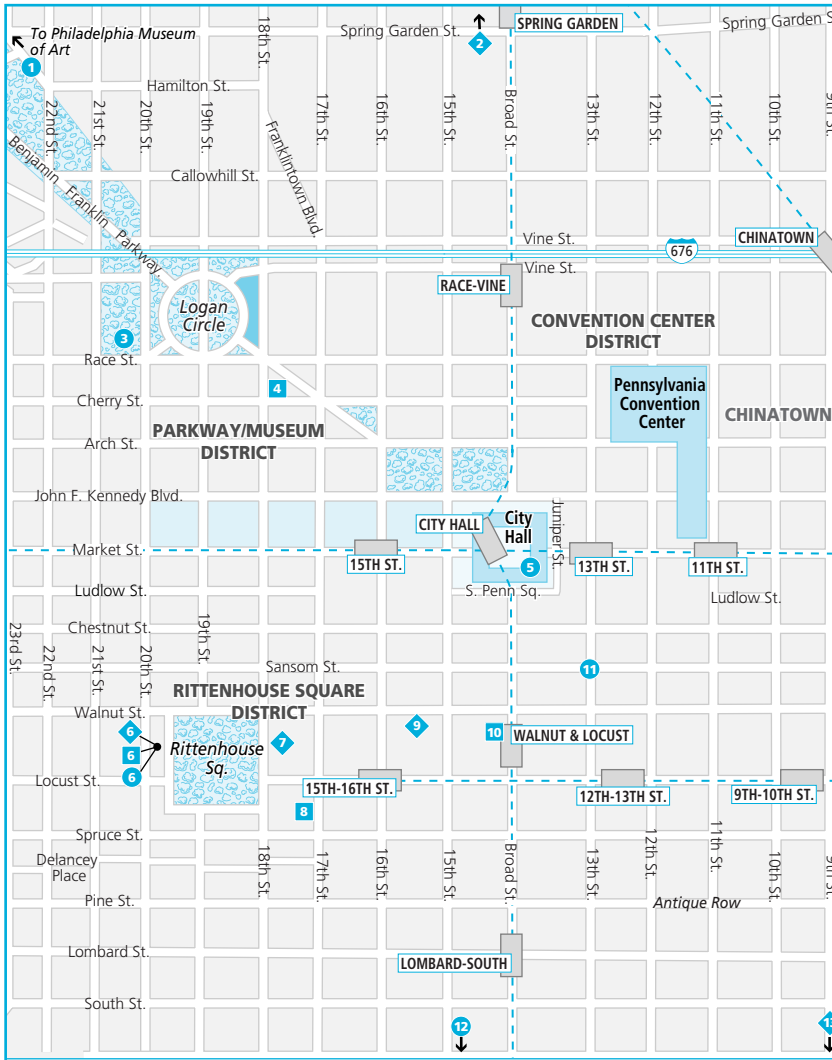
GETTING TO PHILADELPHIA & THE PORT

Ships dock at Pier 1 of the **Philadelphia Cruise Terminal,** 5100 S. Broad St., Bldg. #3 (✆ **856/968-2052,** or 215/462-6790 on the day of your cruise; www.cruisephilly.com), on the site of the former Philadelphia Naval Base, one of the nation's oldest naval facilities. Though you can't walk to much of anything from the mostly industrial port area, a short **taxi** ride away are a host of treasures. If you're flying in, the **Philadelphia International Airport** (✆ **215/937-6800** or 215/937-6937; www.phl.org) is about 7 miles from downtown Philadelphia and less than 10 minutes from the Philadelphia Cruise Terminal at Pier 1. The airport is easily accessible from Interstates 76, 95, and 476. The cost of a **taxi** from the airport to Center City usually exceeds $25.

Those driving in from points north or south of the city (especially New Jersey) should take I-95 to exit 17 (Broad St.). If you're arriving from the south, stay to the left and turn left at the first traffic light onto Zinkoff Boulevard. At the next light, make a quick left onto Broad Street South and continue straight toward the entrance to the Naval Yard. You'll then be directed to turn left onto League Island Boulevard, where you'll find signs directing you to the parking and drop-off location. From points north, turn left at the second traffic light onto Broad Street and continue to the terminal. Signs will direct you to the parking and drop-off areas. If you're driving in from the west, take I-76 east to exit 349 (Broad St.). Bear right at the end of the off ramp onto Broad Street South; it's 1 mile to the terminal. For more extensive driving directions from other locations, see **www.cruisephilly.org**. The parking facility charges $12 per day, upfront. All vehicle passengers must show a photo ID.

GETTING AROUND There may not be any taxis waiting at the terminal, but you can call one of these companies: **Olde City Taxi** (✆ **215/338-0838**), **City Cab Company** (✆ **215/492-6500**), or **Quaker City Cab** (✆ **215/728-8000**). The meter starts at $2.70 and adds $2.10 for each additional mile.

Philadelphia



CRUISE TERMINAL 12

ATTRACTIONS & SHOPPING

Adventure Aquarium **23**
Battleship *New Jersey* **23**
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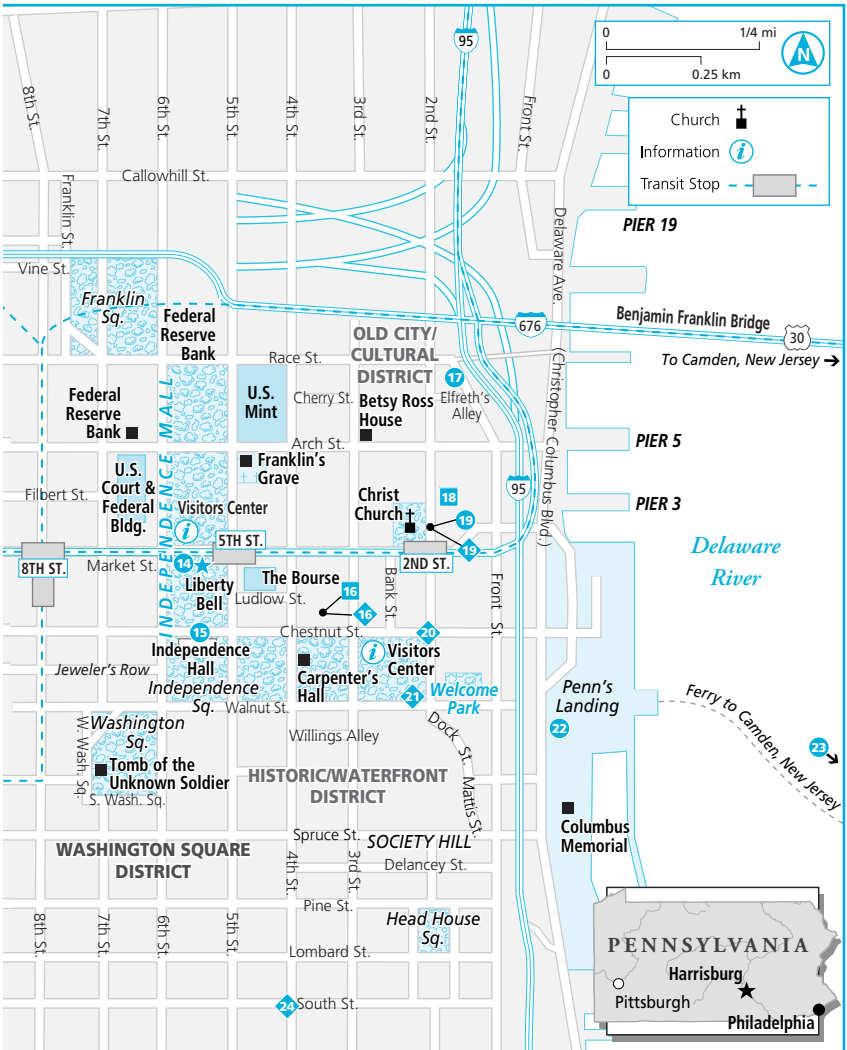
City Hall **5**
Elfreth's Alley **17**
Franklin Institute Science Museum **3**
Independence Hall **15**
Independence Seaport Museum **22**
Independence Visitor Center **14**
Liberty Bell Pavilion **14**
Midtown Village **11**
Philadelphia Museum of Art **1**
Rittenhouse Square **6**



ACCOMMODATIONS ■
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Omni Hotel at Independence Park **16**
Park Hyatt Philadelphia at the Bellevue **10**
Penn's View Hotel **18**
Rittenhouse Hotel **6**
Rittenhouse 1715 **8**

DINING & NIGHTLIFE ◆
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Buddakan **16**
City Tavern **21**
Fork **19**
Geno's Steaks **13**
Jim's Steaks **24**
Lacroix **6**
Le Bec-Fin **9**
Osteria **2**
Rouge **7**
Pat's King of Steaks **13**

SEPTA (**Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority; ✆ 215/580-7800;** www.septa.org) operates an extensive network of trolleys, buses, commuter trains, and subways. If you have trouble getting a taxi, SEPTA shuttle bus no. 71 runs frequently between the terminal area and the Pattison Avenue subway stop on Broad Street, about 2 miles away. In Center City, the Rapid Transit subway cars speed under Broad Street (called the Broad St. line) and Market Street (called the Market–Frankford El), intersecting under City Hall, while the city's buses go pretty much everywhere tourists want to go. Visitors might find the easiest way to get to know the city is via the purple **PHLASH buses** (**✆ 215/636-1666;** www.phillyphlash.com), which depart and pick up from attractions and key Center City locations every 12 minutes between 10am and 6pm (May–Oct). PHLASH buses link Independence Park sites, the Delaware waterfront, the Convention Center, Rittenhouse Square shopping, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The total loop takes 50 minutes and makes 21 stops. A one-time pass is $2, but get the all-day unlimited-ride pass for $5, or pay $10 for an all-day pass for a family of four. SEPTA also has an all-day (eight-ride) $6 fare for city buses, but the two systems ***do not*** accept each other's passes. Children 5 and under ride free on both systems. There are also free shuttle trolleys between the Cruise Terminal and parking facilities.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Philly Highlights ($45, 3 hr.): Because Philadelphia is almost exclusively an embarkation port, most cruise lines offer only the standard city highlights tour for those flying out after about 2 or 3pm. Traveling by bus, you'll pass by Franklin Court, the site of Benjamin Franklin's home; Elfreth's Alley, an oasis of early-18th-century houses believed to be the nation's oldest continuously inhabited street; seamstress Betsy Ross's tiny home on Arch Street, with the Stars and Stripes waving outside; and the impressive Colonial Christ Church. Your scenic drive will take you past Independence National Historic Park and the famous Liberty Bell, plus Independence Hall, where the Declaration of Independence was adopted, and on to Congress Hall, which housed the U.S. legislature between 1790 and 1800 when Philadelphia was the capital city. You'll make a brief stop at the Park Visitor Center before proceeding to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, a gracious green diagonal modeled after the Champs-Elysées in Paris, connecting City Hall, the nation's largest municipal building, to the famous Philadelphia Art Museum, which resembles a Greek temple. The tour ends at Philadelphia International Airport.

EXPLORING PHILADELPHIA ON YOUR OWN

Consider Philadelphia's sightseeing possibilities: the most historic square mile in America; a huge number of museums; innumerable Colonial churches, row houses, and mansions; an Ivy League campus; and leafy, distinguished green spaces, including Fairmount Park, the largest park within city limits in the United States. Philadelphia has come a long way since 1876, when a guidebook recommended seeing the new Public Buildings at Broad and Market streets, the Naval Yards, the old YMCA, and the fortresslike prison (which is still a tourist site as the Eastern State Penitentiary!).

Most of what you'll want to see within the city falls inside a rectangle on the map: between the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers in width, and between South and Vine streets in height. It's easy to organize your days into walking tours of various parts of the city; nothing is that far away. A stroll from City Hall (about 5 miles from the

cruise terminal) to the Philadelphia Museum of Art takes about 25 minutes, although the flags and flowers along the Parkway will undoubtedly sidetrack you. A walk down Market or one of the "tree" streets (Chestnut, Spruce, Pine, Locust) to Independence National Historical Park and Society Hill should take a little less time—but it probably won't, as there's so much to entice you on the way. If you'd rather ride, May to October the spiffy PHLASH buses loop past most major attractions about every 12 minutes.

The city is wrapping some of its attractions together in various packages, and the Independence Visitor Center and other locations offer several passes. **Philadelphia CityPass** allows admission to six major attractions, including the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Franklin Institute, the National Constitution Center, the zoo, and Adventure Aquarium; passes are $54 for adults and $37 for children 3 to 12, and may be purchased in advance at **www.citypass.com** (click on "Philadelphia CityPass") or at any of the included attractions. Passes are good up to 9 days from first use, and they represent about a 50% discount over full admission prices.

If you have just a day in Philadelphia, start at the **Independence Visitor Center** and the nearby **Liberty Bell Pavilion** in **Independence National Historical Park,** Chestnut Street between Fifth and Sixth streets (✆ **800/537-7676** or 215/965-7676; www.nps.gov/inde; free admission, but you'll need a ticket to join a tour of the park Mar–Dec), then move south through **Independence Hall** and on to residential **Society Hill,** a neighborhood steeped in U.S. history. For those with a few more hours to explore, hop onto a 90-minute trolley or double-decker bus tour via Philadelphia Trolley Works (✆ **215/389-TOUR** [389-8687]; www.phillytour.com); each tour includes marvelous guides, a day's worth of on-and-off privileges (in 20 stops), and a great view of pretty much all of Center City's attractions; $25 for adults and $8 for children. For evening culture and entertainment, find out what's going on at the Academy of Music, the Kimmel Center, the Annenberg Center at the University of Pennsylvania, the Wachovia Center, Lincoln Financial Field, or Citizens Bank Park (the last three facilities host sports events and concerts).

If you've got a couple of days in town, spend one on this self-guided tour: Starting at **City Hall,** Broad and Market streets (✆ **215/686-2840;** www.phila.gov/property/virtualcityhall), walk up the Benjamin Franklin Parkway to Logan Circle and spend the afternoon at the **Franklin Institute Science Museum,** 222 N. 20th St. (✆ **215/448-1200;** www.fi.edu; admission varies depending on what you want to see), or the **Philadelphia Museum of Art,** at 26th Street (✆ **215/763-8100** or 215/684-7500; www.philamuseum.org; admission: $14 adults, $12 seniors, $10 students and children 13–18). When you're done, circle back to **Rittenhouse Square** for a glass of wine at one of the parkside bistros, or a nibble at the neighborhood's myriad bistros.

If you're in town for 3 days, spend a morning in the Old City, viewing **Christ Church,** on Second Street, half a block north of Market (✆ **215/922-1695;** www.christchurchphila.org), and **Elfreth's Alley,** between Second and Front streets and Arch and Race (✆ **215/574-0560;** www.elfrethsalley.org). Then, you can explore the expanding Delaware River waterfront attractions and the **Independence Seaport Museum,** Penn's Landing at 211 S. Columbus Blvd. (✆ **215/413-8655;** www.phillyseaport.org). Combined admission to the museum and Historic Ship Zone—the USS *Olympia* and USS *Becuna* are both berthed at Penn's Landing—is $9 adults, $8 seniors, and $6 children. Finally, visit the **Adventure Aquarium,** 1 Aquarium Dr. (✆ **866/451-2782** or 856/365-3300; www.adventureaquarium.com; admission: $19

adults, $15 kids) and the docked **Battleship *New Jersey*** (✆ **866/877-6262;** www.battleshipnewjersey.org; admission $19 adults, $14 kids 6–11), both a ferry ride across the Delaware in Camden, New Jersey. The **RiverLink Ferry** (✆ **215/925-5465;** www.riverlinkferry.org) runs during business hours every day in summer from Penn's Landing, with departures every hour. Round-trip fare is $6 adults, $5 seniors and children.

SHOPPING

If you're looking for a miniature replica of the Liberty Bell or Betsy Ross's flag, you won't have to wander far from the real things: **Independence Visitor Center,** Sixth and Market streets (✆ **800/537-7676** or 215/965-7676; www.independencevisitorcenter.com), has a great gift shop—so, for that matter, do the Betsy Ross House and Franklin Court. If it's fashion, home goods, or art you seek, however, your best bets are the high-end shops around **Rittenhouse Square,** 18th and Walnut streets, and **Old City.** Around the former, a mall's worth of upscale chains is peppered with independently owned galleries and boutiques. The latter has a surprisingly chic array of stylish retail and galleries run by local designers and artists; most Old City shops run along Second and Third streets, from Chestnut to Vine streets. A few blocks down, **South Street,** just south of Society Hill, has long been a gathering spot for the younger set who flock here to shop for sneakers, T-shirts, skateboards, hip-hop gear, inexpensive grub—and new mates. And, in the shadow of City Hall, petite **Midtown Village,** in the corridor of 13th between Chestnut and Walnut streets (www.midtownvillage.org), offers a handful of fantastic little boutiques, gift stores, and restaurants.

It's useful to note that the outskirts (mainly the north) of Philadelphia contain prime examples of the enormous malls now ubiquitous at the interchanges of American superhighways—the 21st-century version of Colonial village squares. You'll find all the luxury chains, and even some branches of downtown Philly's gems, at the **King of Prussia Mall** (✆ **610/265-5727;** www.kingofprussia.com)—a 400-plus-store behemoth, second only to Minnesota's Mall of America, and about a 30- to 60-minute drive from downtown—and at **Franklin Mills** (✆ **215/632-1500;** www.franklinmills.com), an outlet mall that draws four times the traffic of the Liberty Bell, about 25 to 35 minutes away.

WHERE TO STAY

For historic accommodations, the top floor of the **Park Hyatt Philadelphia at the Bellevue,** Broad and Walnut streets (✆ **800/223-1234** or 215/893-1234; www.parkphiladelphia.hyatt.com), with its occasionally oddly proportioned rooms, carries traces of a century's worth of history (Thomas Edison designed the fixtures). Rates: from $300. They may not have the history, but rooms at the luxurious **Rittenhouse Hotel,** 210 W. Rittenhouse Sq. (✆ **800/635-1042;** www.rittenhousehotel.com), in Center City, have wonderful views of the Philly landscape, along with Aveda toiletries in the marble bathrooms and plush furnishings. Rates: from $355.

Why not wake up to a view of Independence Park through the curtains at the **Omni Hotel at Independence Park,** Fourth and Chestnut streets (✆ **800/843-6664;** www.omnihotels.com)? In this European-style hotel, all of the guest rooms have views of the Greek Revival Second Bank of the U.S. and a half dozen of America's Georgian jewels. Rates: from $189. The upper floors of the 52-room **Penn's View Hotel,** Front and Market streets (✆ **800/331-7634** or 215/922-7600; www.pennsviewhotel.com), feel like an exquisite club, with views over the Delaware River. All

rooms are richly decorated with Chippendale-inspired furnishings. Rates: from $159. The oversized and moderately priced lodgings at the **Embassy Suites Center City,** 1776 Benjamin Franklin Pkwy. at Logan Square (✆ **800/362-2779;** www.embassysuites.com), come with cute little open-air balconies (yes, the railings are sturdy). All units are suites with separate bedrooms and living rooms, so parents can have their privacy. Rates: $255.

There are few boutique hotels in Philly, but one standout is the elegantly small **Rittenhouse 1715,** 1715 Rittenhouse Place (✆ **877/791-6500** or 215/546-6500; www.rittenhouse1715.com). Tucked along a quiet street in the city's ritziest neighborhood, this former carriage house comprises 23 traditionally appointed rooms, and guests enjoy a delicious continental breakfast of pastries from a shop around the corner. Rates: from $239.

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

Philadelphia's restaurants and bars are seriously wide ranging. Visitors to any section of Center City can easily find both cozy one-room bistros and sprawling theaters of haute cuisine, chic after-work hangouts and divey corner pubs, romantic candlelit lounges and throbbing temples of cocktail hipness, and, of course, the all-consuming (or all-consumed) cheesesteak.

Let's be real: If you're in town, you've got to treat yourself to the city's most classic fare. You'll find the iconic sandwich everywhere, but the meccas of meat and cheese on an Italian roll are **Pat's King of Steaks** (✆ **215/468-1546;** www.patskingofsteaks.com) and **Geno's Steaks** (✆ **215/389-0659;** www.genosteaks.com), South Philly's famously dueling, ever neon-lit 24-hour stands, across the street from each other at the intersection of Passyunk Avenue, 9th and Wharton streets; and **Jim's Steaks**, closer to Center City at 4th and South streets (✆ **215/928-1911;** www.jimssteaksphilly.com), which is open until 1am and serves beer.

Diners seeking slightly more cutting-edge fare would do well to head to **Rittenhouse Square** and **Old City.** Both neighborhoods are dense with dining and drinking, with Rittenhouse Square tending toward the buttoned-down business and business-school crowd, and Old City attracting a stylish mix of artsy types and resolute barhoppers. The new favorite around Rittenhouse Square is doubtlessly sparkly **Parc,** 227 S. 18th St. (✆ **215/545-2262**), a Pastis-like brasserie with a lengthy sidewalk cafe and a boisterously important crowd. Also nearby: famed and formal **Le Bec-Fin,** 1523 Walnut St. (✆ **215/567-1000;** www.lebecfin.com; fixed-price dinners from $155), chef Georges Perrier's five-star homage to the finest of French service and cuisine; and a slightly less orthodox tribute to gourmet fare in **Lacroix,** 210 W. Rittenhouse Sq. (✆ **215/546-9000;** www.lacroixrestaurant.com; four courses for $78) where maverick chef Matt Levin serves up delicious culinary experiments.

Old City's most popular eateries include **Buddakan,** 325 Chestnut St. (✆ **215/574-9440;** www.buddakan.com), where a giant gilded Buddha lords over family-style meals of wok-fried lobster and chocolate pagodas. Main courses: $18 to $32. At nearby **Amada,** 214–216 Chestnut St. (✆ **215/625-2450;** www.amadarestaurant.com), edgy Spanish tapas-style meals come with a side of live flamenco dancing. Tapas dishes: $5 to $32. A romantic escape from showier spots is lovely **Fork,** 306 Market St. (✆ **215/625-9425;** www.forkrestaurant.com), where the worldly menu largely consists of locally produced ingredients. Main courses: $19 to $33. Also in this historic district: the historically correct **City Tavern,** 138 S. Second St., near Walnut Street (✆ **215/413-1443;** www.citytavern.com), modeled after the same site where

John Adams, George Washington, and the others hammered out plans for our nation over pints of beer. Today, the restaurant replicates a slightly more genteel atmosphere, with 18th-century-recipe potpies and cakes. Main courses: $18 to $33.

Just north of City Hall is the most ballyhooed Italian eatery in town: **Osteria,** 640 N. Broad St. (✆ **215/763-0920;** www.osteriaphilly.com), is brought to you by chef Marc Vetri, a kitchen genius who draws serious crowds to his casual-chic spot for decadently edgy pizzas and brilliant wild boar Bolognese. Main courses: $24 to $30.

15 San Diego, California

San Diego is best known for its benign climate and fabulous beaches, which combine to make the city one big playground. With 70 miles of sandy coastline—plus pretty, sheltering Mission Bay—you can choose from a whole slew of watersports, while miles of paved pathways make for great biking or skating. Splendid Balboa Park, one of the finest urban oases in the country, is home to 15 museums as well as gardens, theaters, and recreational facilities.

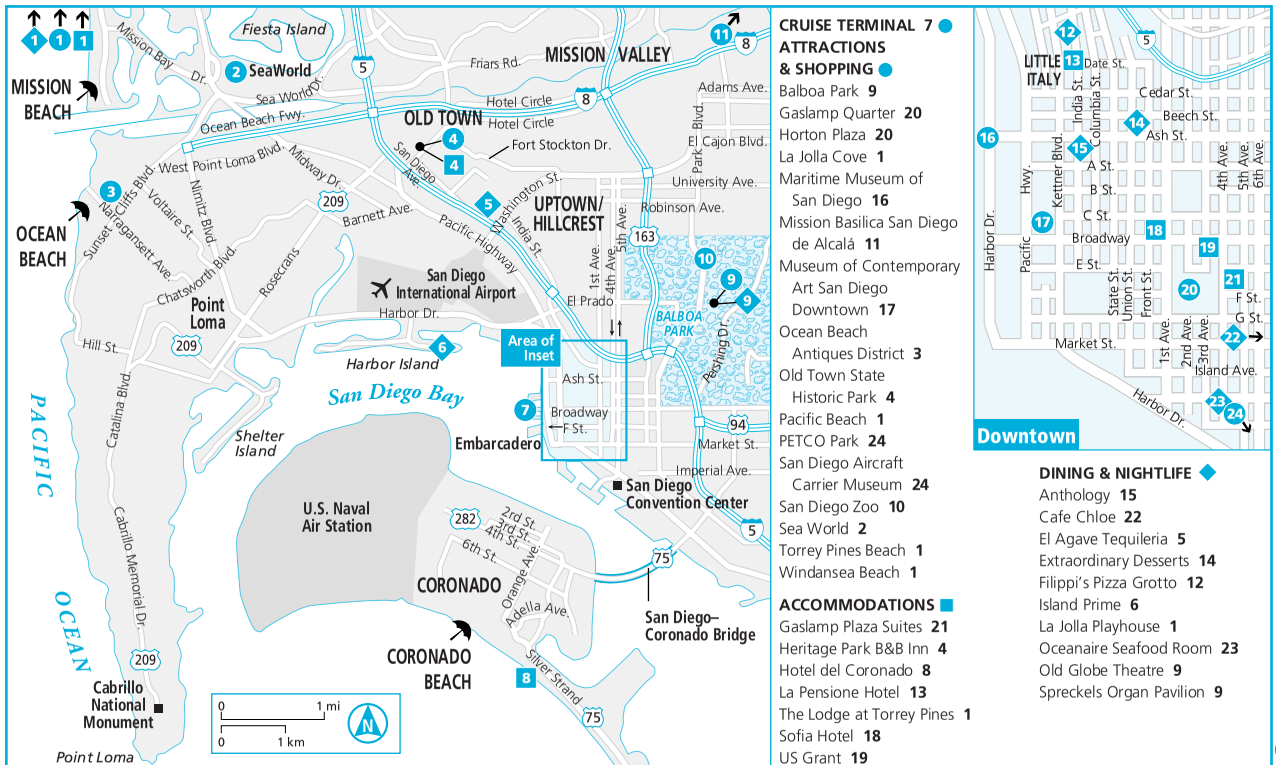
San Diego was the first European settlement on the west coast of America, and though it spent a lot of years being looked down on as a conservative, slow-growth Navy town, it has come to life over the past decade and a half. Today, the city in the bottom-left corner of the U.S. boasts a diverse population and revitalized neighborhoods, and although its population is 1.3 million and rising, you'll find it hasn't lost its small-town ambience or a strong connection with its Hispanic heritage and culture. (Mexico, remember, is just 16 miles to the south.)

San Diego's **downtown** sits at the edge of San Diego Bay, a large natural harbor with flat Coronado on one side and peninsular Point Loma on the other. North from Point Loma is **Mission Bay,** a lagoon that was carved out of an estuary in the 1940s, and now serves as a watersports mecca. A series of communities are found along the beach-lined coast: Ocean Beach, Mission Beach, Pacific Beach, La Jolla, and, just outside San Diego's city limits, Del Mar. To the south of downtown, you'll find **National City,** which is distinguished by shipyards on its bay side, then Chula Vista, and San Ysidro, which ends abruptly at the border (and where the huge city of Tijuana begins, equally abruptly). Inland areas are perhaps best defined by **Mission Valley**—a mile-wide canyon running east-west, 2 miles north of downtown—which is the most congested and least charming part of the city. Along the coast, the city stretches up to **La Jolla,** with its beautiful coastline and ultrarich populace.

GETTING TO SAN DIEGO & THE PORT

San Diego's **B Street Cruise Ship Terminal** is at 1140 N. Harbor Dr., right in the heart of downtown (✆ **800/854-2757** or 619/686-6200; www.sandiegocruiseport.com). If you're arriving by air, you'll probably touch down at the **San Diego International Airport** (✆ **619/231-2100;** www.san.org), also called Lindbergh Field. It's just northwest of downtown, along the bay and close to the piers. Metered **taxis** cost about $8 to the port.

If you're coming by car on the I-5 southbound, take the Front Street exit, stay in the right lane for two lights, turn right at Ash Street, and follow it until it dead-ends at Harbor Drive. Turn left, and you'll see the pier on your right. The closest parking is across the street at the Lane Field facility on Broadway between Pacific Highway and North Harbor Drive ($15). This site will eventually be undergoing major redevelopment, though, and parking may no longer be available here. There are also several



CRUISE TERMINAL 7 ●

ATTRACTIONS & SHOPPING ●

Balboa Park **9**
Gaslamp Quarter **20**
Horton Plaza **20**
La Jolla Cove **1**
Maritime Museum of San Diego **16**
Mission Basilica San Diego de Alcalá **11**
Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego Downtown **17**
Ocean Beach Antiques District **3**
Old Town State Historic Park **4**
Pacific Beach **1**
PETCO Park **24**
San Diego Aircraft Carrier Museum **24**
San Diego Zoo **10**
Sea World **2**
Torrey Pines Beach **1**
Windansea Beach **1**

ACCOMMODATIONS ■

Gaslamp Plaza Suites **21**
Heritage Park B&B Inn **4**
Hotel del Coronado **8**
La Pensione Hotel **13**
The Lodge at Torrey Pines **1**
Sofia Hotel **18**
US Grant **19**

DINING & NIGHTLIFE ◆

Anthology **15**
Cafe Chloe **22**
El Agave Tequileria **5**
Extraordinary Desserts **14**
Filippi's Pizza Grotto **12**
Island Prime **6**
La Jolla Playhouse **1**
Oceanaire Seafood Room **23**
Old Globe Theatre **9**
Spreckels Organ Pavilion **9**

park-and-ride lots that serve both the cruise ship terminal and the airport, with rates ranging from $10 to $24 per day.

GETTING AROUND Those staying for a short time in the downtown area will be able to cover the close-in attractions (including Balboa Park and Old Town) on foot or by using the city buses and trolleys. You can also try the narrated **Old Town Trolley Tours** (✆ **619/298-8687;** www.historictours.com/sandiego) or **City Sightseeing** (✆ **619/296-2400;** www.citysightseeing-sd.com), both of which provide an easy way to get an overview of the city and combine visits to several major attractions without driving or resorting to cabs. Both tours run every half-hour and you can hop on and off at any of the scheduled stops. A complete loop with Old Town Trolley, which uses vehicles gussied up like old-time trolleys, takes about 2 hours; City Sightseeing, utilizing open-top double-decker buses, breaks its tour into two 1-hour loops. Rates are $25 to $32 for adults and $15 to $20 for children.

For attractions, accommodations, and beaches in the greater city, having your own wheels is a big advantage. Major **car-rental** agencies are based at the airport. Taxis are also available, though after dark they don't cruise the streets looking for passengers (except in the Gaslamp Quarter). If you need one, call ahead. Among the local companies are **Orange Cab** (✆ **619/291-3333**), **San Diego Cab** (✆ **619/226-8294**), and **Yellow Cab** (✆ **619/234-6161**). The **Coronado Cab Company** (✆ **619/435-6211**) serves Coronado. Rates are $2.40 for the first ⅒-mile and $2.60 for each additional mile.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

SeaWorld ($77, 7 hr.): San Diego's SeaWorld Adventure Park is one of the largest and best marine-life parks in the world. While this tour is about $10 to $20 more than the park's admission price, it's a viable option if you don't want to worry about arranging your own transportation.

Coronado Cycling Tour ($37, 3½ hr.): From the ship, you'll take a bus and then ferry over to Coronado, where you'll set off on a ride to visit Glorietta Bay, the world-famous Hotel del Coronado, and Ocean Boulevard with its Victorian mansions and white-sand beaches.

Whale-Watching ($27, 3½ hr.): This fully narrated trip departs right from the pier and heads out in search of Pacific gray whales, which pass San Diego on their 6,000-mile migration from the Arctic to the Baja Coast. This is a seasonal tour that operates from mid-December through the end of March.

EXPLORING SAN DIEGO ON YOUR OWN

Unless you head to the beaches, you'll probably spend most of your time in **downtown** and **Old Town.** The business, shopping, dining, and entertainment heart of the city, the downtown area encompasses the Embarcadero (waterfront), the Gaslamp Quarter, Horton Plaza (see "Shopping," below), the Convention Center, San Diego's Little Italy, and other areas. A **Visitor Information Center** (✆ **619/236-1212**) is right across the street from the cruise terminal at the corner of Harbor Drive and West Broadway.

Right on the waterfront, just north of the cruise terminal, is the flotilla of ships that comprise the **Maritime Museum of San Diego,** 1492 N. Harbor Dr. (✆ **619/234-9153;** www.sdmaritime.org). The full-rigged merchant vessel *Star of India* dates from 1863 and is the world's oldest ship that still goes to sea. The gleaming white,

steam-powered ferry *Berkeley* (1898) once ran the route between San Francisco and Oakland, and worked round-the-clock to carry people to safety following the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Other vessels include the HMS *Surprise,* a replica of an 18th-century Royal Navy frigate used in the film *Master and Commander;* a Cold War–era Soviet submarine; and the sleek *Medea* (1904), one of the last remaining large steam yachts. You can board and explore each vessel and also check out the collection of maritime artifacts and themed exhibits. Admission is $14 adults, $11 seniors, and $8 kids ages 6 to 17; kids 5 and under are free.

Along the same stretch of the harbor, the **San Diego Aircraft Carrier Museum,** 910 Harbor Dr., at Navy Pier (✆ **619/544-9600;** www.midway.org), is actually the aircraft carrier *Midway,* commissioned in 1945 and a veteran of Vietnam and Gulf War I. In all, more than 225,000 men served aboard the vessel. A self-guided audio tour takes visitors to several levels of the ship, telling the story of life on board. The highlight is climbing up the superstructure to the bridge and gazing down on the 1,001-foot-long flight deck, with various aircraft poised for duty. What really brings the experience to life is the occasional graffiti and other reminders left behind by the crew. Admission is $17 adults, $13 seniors and students, and $9 kids 6 to 17; free for children 5 and under.

Visitors looking for something less nautical can head across Harbor Drive to the Santa Fe Depot and check out one of the city's cultural landmarks, the **Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego Downtown,** 1100 Kettner Blvd. (✆ **858/454-3541;** www.mcasd.org). This new museum space was built originally in 1915 as the baggage building for the historic train station; repurposed in 2007, it now features permanent, commissioned pieces by artists such as Richard Serra and Jenny Holzer, as well as exhibitions of world-class contemporary art. Across the street is MCASD's original downtown annex (1001 Kettner Blvd.), which has a great little gift shop. Admission is $10 adults, $5 seniors, free for anyone 25 and under.

A National Historic District covering 16½ city blocks, San Diego's **Gaslamp Quarter** has many Victorian-style commercial buildings built between the Civil War and World War I. The center of a massive redevelopment kicked off in the mid-1980s with the opening of the Horton Plaza shopping complex, the once-seedy area is now packed with trendy boutiques, restaurants, and nightspots. Lit by electric versions of old gas lamps, the Gaslamp Quarter lies between Fourth Avenue to the west, Sixth Avenue to the east, Broadway to the north, and L Street and the waterfront to the south. It makes for good walking and shopping during the day, but the real action here is at night. Immediately southeast of the Gaslamp Quarter is **PETCO Park,** stylish home of the San Diego Padres since 2004.

At the northeast edge of downtown lies **Balboa Park,** one of San Diego's true treasures, sitting on a 1,200-acre square that contains the San Diego Zoo, more than a dozen museums, a classic carousel, wonderful gardens, and splendid architecture. Stop by the **Balboa Park Visitor Center,** located in the House of Hospitality (✆ **619/239-0512;** www.balboapark.org), to learn about free walking and museum tours, or to pick up a brochure about the gardens. The park was established in 1868 in the heart of the city, fringed by the early communities of Hillcrest and Golden Hill to the north and east. Tree plantings started in the late 19th century, while the initial buildings were created to host the 1915 to 1916 Panama–California International Exposition; another expo in 1935 and 1936 brought additional developments. The park is divided by Hwy. 163 into two distinct sections. The narrow western wing has

largely grassy, open areas that parallel Sixth Avenue. It's a good place for picnics, strolling, and sunning. The main portion of the park, east of 163, contains all of the park's 15 museums (many of them in the beautiful Spanish Colonial Revival buildings that line **El Prado,** the park's east-west pedestrian thoroughfare) and is bordered by Park Boulevard.

This is also where you'll find the world-famous **San Diego Zoo,** 2920 Zoo Dr. (✆ **619/231-1515;** www.sandiegozoo.org), operated by the Zoological Society of San Diego. Founded in 1916 with a handful of animals originally brought here for that same Panama–California Exposition, the zoo now has more than 4,000 creatures in residence, including four giant pandas from the People's Republic of China, wild Przewalski horses from Mongolia, Buerger's tree kangaroos from New Guinea, lowland gorillas from Africa, and giant tortoises from the Galapagos, as well as more than 700,000 plants. At press time, the zoo was set to open its latest attraction, Elephant Odyssey, featuring a herd of Asian elephants, as well as life-sized replicas of prehistoric animals that once roamed Southern California. The park's Children's Zoo features a nursery with baby animals and a petting area where kids can cuddle up to sheep, goats, and the like. Admission is $35 for adults, $31 for seniors, and $26 for children 3 to 11; the price includes a guided bus tour and aerial tram ride.

Northwest of the park, heading toward Mission Bay, is San Diego's **Old Town,** where the first European settlement of California took place. It's the Williamsburg of the West, allowing you to go back to a time of one-room schoolhouses and village greens, when many of the people who lived, worked, and played here spoke Spanish. At **Old Town State Historic Park,** on San Diego Avenue and Twiggs Street (✆ **619/220-5422;** www.parks.ca.gov), you don't have to look hard or very far to see the past. Dedicated to re-creating the early life of the city from 1821 to 1872, this is where San Diego's Mexican heritage shines brightest. Seven of the park's 20 structures are original, including homes made of adobe; the rest are reconstructed. The park's headquarters is at the **Robinson-Rose House,** 4002 Wallace St., where you can pick up a map and peruse a model of Old Town as it looked in 1872. Among the park's attractions are **La Casa de Estudillo,** which depicts the living conditions of a wealthy family in 1872; and **Seeley Stables,** named after A. L. Seeley, who ran the stagecoach and mail service in these parts from 1867 to 1871. On Wednesdays, from 10am to 2pm, costumed park volunteers re-enact life in the 1800s with cooking and crafts demonstrations, a working blacksmith, and parlor singing. Free 1-hour walking tours leave daily at 11am and 2pm from the Robinson-Rose House. Admission is free.

Not far from Old Town lies the vast suburban sprawl of **Mission Valley.** Until I-8 was built in the 1950s, it was little more than cow pastures with a couple of dirt roads, but shopping malls, motels, a golf course, condos, car dealerships, and a massive sports stadium fill the expanse today, following the San Diego River upstream to the **Mission Basilica San Diego de Alcalá,** 10818 San Diego Mission Rd. (✆ **619/281-8449;** www.missionsandiego.com). Established in 1769 above Old Town, this was the first link in a chain of 21 missions founded by Spanish missionary Junípero Serra. It was moved to its present location in 1774 for agricultural reasons, and to separate Native American converts from the fortified compound that included the original building. The mission was burned by Indians a year after it was built, and when Father Serra rebuilt it, he used 5- to 7-foot-thick adobe walls and clay tile roofs—making it less likely to burn again, and in the process inspiring a bevy of 20th-century California architects. It's still an active Catholic parish, with Mass daily. Admission is $3.

Head back west toward the water to experience **Mission Bay,** where someone probably took the photos for the postcards you'll send home. Mission Bay is a watery playground perfect for water-skiing, sailing, and windsurfing. The adjacent communities of Ocean Beach, Mission Beach, and Pacific Beach are known for their wide stretches of sand, active nightlife, and casual dining. This is the place to stay if you want to walk barefoot on the sand or are traveling with beach-loving children, and it's also home to **SeaWorld,** 500 Sea World Dr. (✆ **800/257-4268;** www.seaworld.com), one of the big draws for many visitors to San Diego. Owned by Anheuser-Busch, the 189-acre aquatic theme park has performing animals (from dogs to dolphins), thrill rides, and marine enclosures featuring penguins, sharks, and manatees. Several successive 4-ton black-and-white killer whales have held the role of **Shamu,** the park's mascot, performing in two shows: ***Believe*** and ***Shamu Rocks,*** a nighttime production incorporating concert lighting and contemporary music. There's also a passel of *Sesame Street*–related attractions, including a "4-D" interactive movie experience. Admission costs $65 for adults, $55 for kids 3 to 9. Discount packages that combine SeaWorld with admission to the San Diego Zoo (see above) are available.

BEACHES

San Diego County is blessed with 70 miles of sandy coastline and more than 30 individual beaches that cater equally to surfers, snorkelers, swimmers, sailors, divers, walkers, volleyball players, and sunbathers. Here are some of the best, moving south to north.

Lovely, wide, and sparkling, **Coronado Beach** is conducive to strolling and lingering, especially in the late afternoon. Waves are gentle here, so the beach draws many Coronado families. South of Mission Bay is **Ocean Beach,** a hot spot for surfers, though the water can be rough for swimming. Above Mission Beach, there's always action at **Pacific Beach,** particularly along Ocean Front Walk, a paved boardwalk similar to L.A.'s funky Venice Beach promenade. Surfing is popular year-round here, in marked sections, and the beach is well staffed with lifeguards. Just north, **Windansea Beach** is legendary among California's surfer elite and remains one of San Diego's prettiest strands. Reached by way of Bonair Street (at Neptune Place), it has no facilities and isn't really ideal for swimming. Come to surf, watch surfers, and soak up the party atmosphere. Up in La Jolla, the calm, protected waters of **La Jolla Cove** (part of the San Diego–La Jolla Underwater Park Ecological Reserve) attract snorkelers and scuba divers, along with a fair share of families to its small beach. The park's "look but don't touch" policy protects the colorful garibaldi, California's state fish, plus other marine life, including abalone, octopus, and lobster. The Underwater Park stretches from here to the northern end of Torrey Pines State Reserve, at the southern end of which you'll find **Torrey Pines Beach,** a fabulous underused shoreline, accessed by a pay parking lot ($8 per car; $7 seniors) at the entrance to the park. It's rarely crowded, though be aware that at high tide most of the sand gets a soaking. In almost any weather, it's a great beach for walking.

SHOPPING

Downtown, **Horton Plaza,** 324 Horton Plaza (✆ **619/239-8180;** www.westfield.com/hortonplaza), is the Disneyland of shopping malls and the heart of the revitalized city center, bounded by G Street, Broadway, and First and Fourth avenues. Covering 6½ city blocks, the multilevel mall has more than 180 retail establishments, including major department store chains, clothing and shoe stores, bookshops, and fun stores for kids, plus a variety of restaurants and short-order eateries; there's a 14-screen cinema and a performing arts venue as well. It's almost as much an attraction as SeaWorld

or the San Diego Zoo, transcending its genre with a conglomeration of rambling paths, bridges, towers, piazzas, sculptures, fountains, and live greenery.

North of downtown, compact **Hillcrest** is the hub of San Diego's gay and lesbian community. You'll find swank shops selling chic home furnishings, and places selling used books, vintage clothing, trinkets, and memorabilia. You'll also see some chain stores, bakeries, cafes, and an array of modestly priced, globe-hopping dining options. For antiques, head for the **Ocean Beach Antiques District** (www.obantiquedistrict.com) along the 4800 block of Newport Avenue. Situated just a few blocks from the beach, this has the city's largest concentration of antiques dealers.

WHERE TO STAY

The following lodgings run the gamut of styles, as well as locations, from Coronado and downtown to La Jolla.

The **Hotel del Coronado,** 1500 Orange Ave., Coronado (✆ **800/468-3533;** www.hoteldel.com), is the last of California's stately seaside hotels. Opened in 1888 and the subject of meticulous restoration, this Victorian masterpiece had some of the first electric lights in existence, and its early days are well chronicled in displays throughout the property. Rates: from $300. For something just as historic, but much more homey, check out the **Heritage Park Bed & Breakfast Inn,** 2470 Heritage Park Row, San Diego (✆ **800/995-2470;** www.heritageparkinn.com). This exquisite 1889 Queen Anne mansion is artfully set within a cluster of restored Victorian buildings saved from the wrecking ball; it's just 1 short block from the shops, restaurants, and attractions of Old Town. Rates: from $125.

You don't need to know much about Craftsman-style architecture to appreciate the taste and keen craftsmanship that went into creating the **Lodge at Torrey Pines,** 11480 N. Torrey Pines Rd., La Jolla (✆ **800/656-0087;** www.lodgetorreypines.com). The city's only AAA Five Diamond hotel, it sits next to the Torrey Pines Golf Course, San Diego's top links. You can enjoy a fireplace in your room, sunset ocean views from your balcony, and superb meals at the hotel's A. R. Valentien restaurant. Rates: from $325.

The 11-story **Gaslamp Plaza Suites,** 520 E St. (✆ **800/874-8770;** www.gaslamplaza.com), is a comfortable landmark (dating from 1913, when it was San Diego's first skyscraper) with superfriendly rates, located smack-dab in the heart of the trendy Gaslamp Quarter. Rates: from $119. In downtown's Little Italy neighborhood, **La Pensione Hotel,** 606 W. Date St. (✆ **800/232-4683;** www.lapensionehotel.com), feels like a small European hotel and has tidy lodgings at bargain prices. There's an abundance of great dining spots in the surrounding blocks, and you'll be perfectly situated to explore the rest of town by car or trolley. Rates: $90.

The Gothic Revival **Sofia Hotel,** 150 W. Broadway (✆ **800/826-0009;** www.thesofiahotel.com), was once one of the city's luxury properties, built in 1926 as the Pickwick. Centrally located on the edge of the Gaslamp Quarter and within walking distance of the Embarcadero, the 211-unit hotel has been recently restored and reinvigorated. It features a comfortably chic design scheme and an excellent American-style bistro, Currant. Rates: from $169.

The **US Grant,** 326 Broadway (✆ **800/237-5029;** www.usgrant.net), is one of San Diego's most historic properties, originally built in 1910 by the son of Ulysses S. Grant. It sits at the northern edge of the Gaslamp Quarter in all its impressive Beaux Arts beauty, and guest rooms have 9-foot ceilings, ornate decor, and Native-American artwork (the hotel is owned by the Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation, which was given sovereignty in 1875 by Pres. Grant). Rates: from $300.

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

You're *sooooo* close to Mexico, you might as well have Mexican food, no? The best place in San Diego is, naturally, in Old Town, at **El Agave Tequileria,** 2304 San Diego Ave. (✆ **619/220-0692;** www.elagave.com). Rather than the "combination plate" fare that's common on this side of the border, this place presents a memorable selection of freshly prepared recipes from Veracruz, Chiapas, Puebla, and Mexico City, along with an impressive choice of boutique and artisan tequilas. Main courses: $16 to $32.

If you want to know what San Diego tastes like, you can find out at **Market,** 3702 Via de la Valle (✆ **858/523-0007;** www.marketdelmar.com), where native son Carl Schroeder creates a daily menu from the best ingredients bought from local ranches, farms, and seafood purveyors. Main courses: $23 to $30.

For seafood, try **Island Prime,** 880 Harbor Island Dr. (✆ **619/298-6802;** www.cohnrestaurants.com), with over-the-water dining, a patio with a fireplace, and a menu by chef Deborah Scott that rivals the spectacular bay and skyline views. Main courses: $25 to $49. The Gaslamp Quarter's **Oceanaire Seafood Room,** 400 J St. (✆ **619/858-2277;** www.theoceanaire.com) is another great spot to sample the ocean's bounty. Have your catch of the day simply broiled or grilled, or enjoy a more elaborate preparation; there's an oyster bar, too. Main courses: $15 to $50.

Creative, whimsical touches abound at **Cafe Chloe,** 721 Ninth Ave. (✆ **619/232-3242;** www.cafechloe.com), a French bistro in downtown's East Village serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner. There is a children's play area, as well as retail space and a patio built for two. Main courses: $8 to $23. For gigantic portions of family-style Italian fare, head to Little Italy and **Filippi's Pizza Grotto,** 1747 India St. (✆ **619/232-5094;** www.realcheesepizza.com), where a salad for one is enough for three, and an order of lasagna must weigh a pound. Filippi's has locations all over the area, including Pacific Beach, Mission Gorge, and Escondido. Main courses: $6 to $15.

Considering dinner and a show? **Anthology,** 1337 India St. (✆ **619/595-0300;** www.anthologysd.com) has you covered. This Little Italy supper club is architecturally striking and features a modern American cuisine created by award-winning chef Bradley Ogden. The music onstage is as compelling as the food, ranging from jazz and blues to world music and rock. Main courses: $19 to $28. Be sure to save some room for dessert at the nearby **Extraordinary Desserts,** 1430 Union St. (✆ **619/294-7001;** www.extraordinarydesserts.com). Also set in a fabulously modern space, this longtime local favorite is open late on weekends. The original sister location is in Hillcrest. Desserts: $2 to $9.

Wherever you choose to dine, finish your evening in the **Gaslamp Quarter,** which always promises a lively after-dark scene with its restaurants, bars, clubs, theaters, and music venues. Another great option is attending a concert in **Balboa Park.** Free year-round organ concerts are held on Sundays from 2 to 3pm at the **Spreckels Organ Pavilion,** south of El Prado between Park Boulevard and the Cabrillo Freeway (✆ **619/702-8138;** www.sosorgan.com). The music runs the gamut from classical to contemporary. Or consider taking in a play—San Diego has a well-deserved reputation as a theater hotbed. The city's two leading operations are the **Old Globe Theatre** in Balboa Park (✆ **619/234-5623;** www.theoldglobe.org) and **La Jolla Playhouse,** located on the campus of the University of California, San Diego (✆ **858/550-1010;** www.lajollaplayhouse.org). Both have produced Tony Award winners, and between them have sent nearly 50 productions to Broadway, including the musicals *Jersey Boys* and *The Full Monty.* The Globe is also known for its summer Shakespeare Festival, which runs June through September.

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San Francisco is America's most romantic European-style city, full of Victorian architecture, stunning bay vistas, swank boutiques, clanky cable cars, walkable beaches, staunch liberalism, and a hugely influential gay population, all tightly tucked into about 7 square miles. After going through a few bleak(ish) years following the dot-com bubble-bust in the early 2000s, the city by the bay picked itself up, dusted off, and started all over again. Even things that seemed to lose their way in the bad years—the city's storied restaurant scene, for instance—are now back and as happening as ever, along with new hotels, renovated museums, and an overall sense of optimism. San Francisco is open for business.

GETTING TO SAN FRANCISCO & THE PORT

Ships dock at the **Port of San Francisco** piers along the Embarcadero (✆ **415/274-0400;** www.sfport.com), within walking distance of Fisherman's Wharf. Parking is $12 per day. Union Square, Powell Street, Market Street, and the center of downtown can be reached by **taxi.** If you're driving, find the Embarcadero and watch for the signs.

If you're flying in, you'll land at one of the Bay Area's two major airports. **San Francisco International Airport** (✆ **650/821-8211;** www.flysfo.com) is 14 miles directly south of downtown on U.S. 101. Travel time to downtown during commuter rush hour is about 40 minutes; at other times, it's about 20 to 25 minutes. **BART** (**Bay Area Rapid Transit;** ✆ **415/989-2278;** www.bart.gov) runs from the airport to downtown, avoiding gnarly traffic and costing a heck of a lot less than taxis and shuttles—about $6 per person to the Embarcadero. Just jump on the airport's free shuttle bus to the International terminal and the BART station. Trains leave approximately every 20 minutes. A **taxi** from the airport to downtown costs about $40 to $45, plus tip. **SuperShuttle** (✆ **415/558-8500;** www.supershuttle.com) takes you anywhere in the city, charging around $17 or so, depending on your destination.

Oakland International Airport (✆ **510/563-3300;** www.oaklandairport.com), about 5 miles south of downtown Oakland, is a popular alternative to flying directly into San Francisco, and is also accessible on the BART system (see above). A **taxi** to downtown San Francisco costs approximately $55, plus tip. **Bayporter Express** (✆ **877/467-1800** in the Bay Area, or 415/467-1800 elsewhere; www.bayporter.com) is a shuttle service that charges $32 for the first person and $15 for each additional person for the ride from the Oakland Airport to downtown San Francisco.

GETTING AROUND You can walk to many attractions from the cruise terminal, including the Embarcadero and sights in the Fisherman's Wharf area, such as Ghirardelli Square (once home to the world-famous chocolate factory), the Cannery, the National Maritime Museum, the Museum of the City of San Francisco, and the ferry to Alcatraz. Otherwise, you have lots of transportation options. The San Francisco Municipal Railway, better known as **Muni** (✆ **415/673-6864;** www.sfmuni.com), operates the city's cable cars, buses, and streetcars. Don't miss riding on that classic San Francisco icon, the historic **cable car.** The three lines are concentrated in the downtown area. The most scenic and exciting is the **Powell–Hyde line,** which follows a zigzag route from the corner of Powell and Market streets, over both Nob Hill and Russian Hill, to a turntable at gaslit Victorian Square in front of Aquatic Park (the closet point to the port, near the intersection of Beach and Hyde sts.). The

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Powell–Mason line starts at the same intersection and climbs Nob Hill before descending to Bay Street, just 3 blocks from Fisherman's Wharf. The third is the California Street line. Rides cost $5 each way.

Buses reach almost every corner of San Francisco and beyond—they even travel over the bridges to Marin County and Oakland. Overhead electric cables power some buses; others use gas engines. All are numbered and display their destinations on the front. Many buses travel along Market Street or pass near Union Square. A bus ride costs $1.50 for adults. If you plan to use public transportation extensively, you might want to invest in a **Muni Street & Transit Map** ($3), sold at the cable car ticket booths at Powell and Market streets and Hyde and Beach streets, as well as in many shops around town.

This isn't New York, so don't expect a **taxi** to appear whenever you need one—or ever, for that matter. You can often find cabs at the major hotels and downtown during rush hour, but otherwise you'd do better calling ahead to **Veteran's Cab** (✆ **415/552-1300**), **Luxor Cabs** (✆ **415/282-4141**), or **Yellow Cab** (✆ **415/333-3333**). Rates are approximately $3.10 for the first ⅕-mile and 45¢ each ⅕-mile thereafter.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Sausalito & Muir Woods ($54, 5 hr.): After a stop in charming Sausalito for bay views and browsing at the town's boutiques, art galleries, and crafts shops, your bus heads to 550-acre Muir Woods, home to a grove of ancient coastal redwoods. You'll have 1½ hours to hike the area's trails on your own before heading back.

Alcatraz & Sausalito by Bus & Ferry ($79, 5½ hr.): This tour begins with a short drive along the Embarcadero to Fisherman's Wharf, where you board the ferry to Alcatraz Island. When you get to Alcatraz, a park ranger will explain the prison's history before you go inside for a private audio tour—and view cells previously inhabited by prison inmates. Afterward, you travel back to Fisherman's Wharf by ferry and board your bus for a drive over the Golden Gate Bridge. In Sausalito, you're free to walk around town and shop.

EXPLORING SAN FRANCISCO ON YOUR OWN

Just north of the cruise docks, **Fisherman's Wharf** (✆ **415/674-7503;** www.fishermanswharf.org) is almost the definition of "tourist trap," a long coastal shopping mall that stretches from Ghirardelli Square at the west end to Pier 39 at the east. If you like this kind of thing—shops, restaurants, street performers, and the like, few of which have anything intrinsically to do with San Francisco—then linger a bit. If not, stop by for a few minutes to gander at the 600-strong **sea lion colony** that's taken up residence on the west (left) side of Pier 39, then follow the smell of fresh-baked bread to **Boudin at the Wharf,** 160 Jefferson St., between Taylor and Mason streets (✆ **415/928-1849;** www.boudinbakery.com). Once just a bakery, it's now a half-block-long celebration of bread, with a demonstration bakery, museum, gourmet marketplace, and cafe/espresso bar/restaurant. You can watch them bake their 3,000 daily loaves through a 30-foot observation window along Jefferson Street or from a catwalk suspended directly over the bakery, then grab a takeout snack from the cafe, and head out to see the city.

From nearby Pier 41, ferries depart throughout the day bound for **Alcatraz Island** (www.nps.gov/alcatraz), the former military post and maximum-security prison that

once housed Al Capone, Machine Gun Kelly, and the famous Birdman, Robert Stroud. Now administered by the National Park Service, "the Rock" has self-guided tours, ranger-led talks about its famous "escape-proof" prison, and nature trails that lead to spectacular San Francisco views and glimpses of the island's abundant wildlife. Ferries are run by **Alcatraz Cruises** (✆ **415/981-7625;** www.alcatrazcruises.com). Tickets are $26 adults, $16 kids, with headset tour. Make your reservation as far in advance as possible, and bring a jacket—it gets cold out there.

Whether traveling to the Rock or not, your next stop should be the intersection of Hyde and Beach, where you can hop the **Powell–Hyde cable car.** Sit or stand near the back, on the left-hand side if possible; that way, you get the view down snakelike Lombard Street as well as the spectacular bay view from the top of **Nob Hill.** When the cable cars started running in 1873, Nob Hill became the most desirable residential area in the city, chockablock with mansions. Only two survived the earthquake and fire of 1906: the Flood Mansion, which serves today as the **Pacific Union Club,** 1000 California St., at Mason Street, and the **Fairmont Hotel,** 950 Mason St., which was under construction when the earthquake struck and is worth a visit for its spectacular lobby. **Grace Cathedral,** on California Street between Taylor and Jones streets, is notable among other things for its stained-glass windows, depicting Thurgood Marshall, Jane Addams, Robert Frost, John Glenn, and Albert Einstein—representations of divinely inspired human endeavor in law, social work, letters, exploration, and science.

Just northeast of Nob Hill, San Francisco's **Chinatown** gives you a taste of that Asia cruise you couldn't afford this year. The first Chinese immigrants came to San Francisco in the early 1800s to work as servants, and today the city boasts one of the largest Chinese communities in the U.S. Cheesy camera and luggage stores cater to the tourists, but skip those and head for the vegetable and herb markets, restaurants, and shops that draw Chinese shoppers. The gateway at Grant Avenue and Bush Street marks the entry to Chinatown. On Waverly Place, a street where the Chinese celebratory colors of red, yellow, and green are much in evidence, you'll find three **Chinese temples:** Jeng Sen (Buddhist and Taoist) at no. 146, Tien Hou (Buddhist) at no. 125, and Norras (Buddhist) at no. 109. If you enter, do it quietly so you do not disturb those in prayer. A block west of Grant Avenue, **Stockton Street,** from 1000 to 1200, is the community's main shopping drag, lined with grocers, fishmongers, tea sellers, herbalists, noodle parlors, and restaurants. Here, too, is the **Buddhist Kon Chow Temple,** at no. 855, above the Chinatown post office. About a quarter mile away, the **Cable Car Museum,** 1201 Mason St. (✆ **415/474-1887;** www.cablecarmuseum.org), is the powerhouse, repair shop, and storage place for San Francisco's cable cars. Built in 1887, the building underwent an $18-million reconstruction to restore its original gaslight-era look, adding an amazing spectators' gallery and a museum of San Francisco transit history. Admission is free.

South of Chinatown and Nob Hill, **Union Square** is the commercial hub of the city, site of most major hotels and department stores. Life is more interesting, though, on the other side of the tracks—or Market Street, as the case may be. There, the neighborhood known as **SoMa** ("South of Market," running between Market, the Embarcadero, and Hwy. 101) was transformed from a district of old warehouses, industrial spaces, and underground clubs into the hub of "dot-com-dom" in the late '90s, and is now the city's cultural and multimedia center. The **San Francisco Museum of Modern Art,** 151 Third St. (✆ **415/357-4000;** www.sfmoma.org), holds more than 23,000 works, including paintings and sculptures by Henri Matisse, Jackson Pollock,

Willem de Kooning, Richard Serra, Diego Rivera, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Paul Klee. Admission is $13; closed Wednesday.

The **Center for the Arts at Yerba Buena Gardens,** 701 Mission St. (✆ **415/978-ARTS** [978-2787]; www.ybca.org), is San Francisco's official cultural facility, presenting music, theater, dance, and visual arts. Cutting-edge computer art, multimedia shows, traditional exhibitions, and performances occupy the center's high-tech galleries. The 5-acre gardens are a great place to relax in the grass on a sunny day; they feature dramatic outdoor sculpture in memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. Between May and October, the gardens host a series of free concerts, festivals, and community events. Admission to the galleries is $7; closed Monday. At Third and King streets on SoMa's waterfront, you'll find the home of the **San Francisco Giants** (✆ **415/972-2000;** www.sfgiants.com). Its corporate name has changed three times in less than a decade because of big-money mergers, and it's now called AT&T Park—a God-awful name for a very pretty ballpark, with its unobstructed bay vistas and bobbing boats beyond the outfield. Tickets are hard to come by, but you can try to track them down through **www.tickets.com**, **www.stubhub.com**, or **sfbay.craigslist.org**.

Southwest of SoMa, few of San Francisco's neighborhoods are as varied as **Haight-Ashbury,** which gained everlasting fame as a capital of '60s hippie culture. Walk along Haight Street today and you'll encounter a weird mix of aging Deadheads, neo-flower-children, homeless people, throngs of tourists, and the kind of clean-cut yuppies who can afford the steep rents of Upper Haight, on the eastern border of **Golden Gate Park.** Funky-trendy shops, clubs, and cafes still line the commercial district, and if someone offers you a bud, he's not talking about beer. To the south, **Castro Street,** between Market and 18th streets, is the center of the city's gay community as well as a lovely neighborhood teeming with shops, restaurants, bars, and cafes.

Within Golden Gate Park, 2 blocks from the park entrance at Eighth Avenue and Fulton, the **de Young Museum,** 50 Hagiwara Tea Garden Dr. (✆ **415/750-3600;** www.famsf.org), is one of San Francisco's oldest museums, founded in 1895. Its vast holdings include one of the finest collections of American paintings in the United States, from Colonial times through the 20th century, as well as decorative arts and crafts; Western and non-Western textiles; and arts from Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. Its 144-foot tower slowly spirals from the ground floor and culminates with an observation floor providing panoramic views of the entire Bay Area. Surrounding sculpture gardens and lush, grassy expanses are perfect for picnicking. Admission is $10; closed Monday.

Across from the de Young, the **California Academy of Sciences,** 55 Music Concourse Dr. (✆ **415/379-8000;** www.calacademy.org), was recently completely revamped and reopened as a true homage to Mother Nature. The 412,000-square-foot, mazelike learning center houses an aquarium, a natural history museum, a planetarium, and a four-story rainforest. A 90-foot glass dome puts many of the animals—from as far away as the Philippine coral reefs to as nearby as the northern California coast—front and center. Admission is $25 for adults, $15 for kids ages 7 to 11, and free for kids 6 and under.

Back up north along San Francisco Bay, the famous **Golden Gate Bridge** connects the City by the Bay with Marin County and the redwoods to the north. Completed in 1937, it's often regarded as the world's most beautiful bridge. If at all possible, take a walk across, accessing the walkway from the parking lots on each side of the span.

The bridge is at the west end of the huge **Presidio** complex; once an Army base, it's now an urban national park full of historic buildings, parkland, and a national cemetery. Near the east end of the park, the **Exploratorium,** 3601 Lyon St. (✆ **415/561-0360;** www.exploratorium.edu), is a must for families with kids—though be warned that you'll be there for most of the day. Designed for hands-on learning, the museum has more than 650 interactive exhibits exploring all facets of science; kids can touch a tornado, shape an electrical current, and finger-paint on a computer. It's located at the gorgeous **Palace of Fine Arts,** the only remaining building from the 1915 Pan-Pacific Exhibition. Admission is $14 adults, $11 kids; closed Monday.

SHOPPING

San Francisco's most congested and popular shopping mecca is centered on **Union Square** and bordered by Bush, Taylor, Market, and Montgomery streets. Most of the big department stores and many high-end specialty shops are here. Be sure to venture to Grant Avenue, Post and Sutter streets, and Maiden Lane. This area is a hub for public transportation; all Market Street buses and several others run here, as do the Powell–Hyde and Powell–Mason cable car lines. When you pass through the gate to **Chinatown** on Grant Avenue, say goodbye to the world of fashion and hello to a swarm of cheap tourist shops selling everything from linen and jade to plastic toys and $2 slippers. The real gems, however, are tucked away on side streets and in small, one-person shops selling Chinese herbs, art, and jewelry.

Union Street, from Fillmore Street to Van Ness Avenue, caters to the upper-middle-class crowd. It's a great place to stroll, window-shop the plethora of boutiques, try the cafes and restaurants, and watch the beautiful people parade by. Take bus no. 22, 41, or 45. Some of the best shopping in town is packed into the 5 blocks of **Fillmore Street** from Jackson to Sutter in Pacific Heights. It's the perfect place to grab a bite and peruse the high-priced boutiques, crafts shops, and incredible housewares stores.

The shops in the 6 blocks of **Upper Haight Street** between Central Avenue and Stanyan Street reflect the area's clientele, selling everything from incense and European and American street styles to furniture and antique clothes. If your shopping tastes are humble, the tourist-oriented malls along Jefferson Street in the **Fisherman's Wharf** area include hundreds of shops, restaurants, and attractions. If your tastes run more literary, head to **City Lights Bookstore,** 261 Columbus Ave., at Broadway on the east edge of Chinatown (✆ **415/362-8193;** www.citylights.com). Founded by Beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti in 1953, the three-level shop specializes in world literature, the arts, and progressive politics.

At the foot of Market Street, along the Embarcadero, the magnificent **Ferry Building Marketplace** (✆ **415/693-0996;** www.ferrybuildingmarketplace.com) is a former transportation hub dating to 1898. Long underused after bridges and cars supplanted ferry use, it was transformed between 1999 and 2003 into a mixed-use space with a 660-foot sky-lit central nave holding a world-class gourmet marketplace. You can browse, sample, nosh, and caffeinate at dozens of specialty shops, then savor the bayfront views from tables set up both indoors and out.

WHERE TO STAY

Looking like a federal building outside and a mansion within, the **Ritz-Carlton,** 600 Stockton St., in Nob Hill (✆ **800/241-3333** or 415/296-7465; www.ritzcarlton.com), is the best bet for those with more traditional tastes and a hankering for

every possible amenity. Rates: from $399. The **Four Seasons San Francisco,** 757 Market St., SoMa (✆ **800/819-5053** or 415/633-3000; www.fourseasons.com), opened in 2001 and provides understated luxury, great service, and oversize rooms with custom-made mattresses. Rates: from $395. The **Westin St. Francis,** 335 Powell St., Union Square (✆ **800/WESTIN-1** [937-8461] or 415/397-7000; www.westin.com), is a favorite with VIPs for its luxurious rooms—and with kids because they get complimentary goodies, such as coloring books, at check-in. Rates: from $219. Also in Union Square are two great boutique hotels, the **Warwick Regis,** 490 Geary St. (✆ **800/827-3447** or 415/928-7900; http://warwicksf.com), with rates from $94, and the **Hotel California,** 580 Geary St. (✆ **800/227-4223** or 415/441-2700; www.hotelca.com/sanfrancisco), with rates from $149.

The **Argonaut Hotel,** 495 Jefferson St. at Hyde St. (✆ **866/415-0704** or 415/563-0800; www.argonauthotel.com), is Fisherman's Wharf's best hotel, a boutique gem with rooms done up in a nautical motif, full of blues, whites, reds, and yellows. Try to book a "view" room, which overlooks the wharf, the bay, and in some cases Alcatraz and the Golden Gate Bridge. The four-story timber-and-brick landmark building was originally built in 1908 as a warehouse, used at one point by William Randolph Hearst to store treasures that eventually ended up at Hearst Castle in San Simeon. Rates: from $134.

If Al Gore were to build a hotel, he might very well build the **Orchard Garden,** 466 Bush St., at Grant (✆ **888/717-2881** or 415/399-9807; www.theorchardgarden hotel.com). Built to U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) standards, it has an in-room recycling system, cleans up with citrus-based cleaning products, and uses a key-card system that turns your room's power off each time you leave. Good karma! It's comfortable, too, with superquiet rooms decorated in natural wood tones and light colors, and outfitted with Egyptian cotton linens and real feather down pillows. Rates: from $189.

The **Hotel Bohème,** 444 Columbus Ave. (✆ **415/433-9111;** www.hotel boheme.com), is a second-floor boutique hotel with 15 small rooms that are reminiscent of a home in upscale Nob Hill, with gauze-draped canopies, ornate parasols shading the ceiling lights, and walls dramatically colored with lavender, sage green, black, and pumpkin. The staff is ultrahospitable, and bonuses include sherry in the lobby each afternoon. Rates: from $174.

Attention to detail, comfortable rooms, and a location along a prime stretch of Union Street make the tiny, six-unit **Union Street Inn,** 2229 Union St. (✆ **415/346-0424;** www.unionstreetinn.com), an excellent way to experience true San Francisco–style living. Rates: from $199. The **Phoenix Hotel,** 601 Eddy St. (✆ **800/248-9466** or 415/776-1380; www.thephoenixhotel.com), is a favorite with the music and movie set (Sinéad O'Connor, David Bowie, and Keanu Reeves have all slept here); it's also one of the only moderately priced hotels in San Francisco with an outdoor pool. Rates: from $119.

At the small, adorable **San Remo Hotel,** 2237 Mason St. (✆ **800/352-REMO** [352-7366] or 415/776-8688; www.sanremohotel.com), the rooms may be small and the bathrooms shared, but the North Beach location (within walking distance of Fisherman's Wharf), friendly staff, and low prices can't be beat. Rates: from $60. Another top choice for convenient location, room amenities, and budget prices is the **Marina Inn,** 3110 Octavia St., Marina/Pacific Heights (✆ **800/274-1420** or 415/928-1000; www.marinainn.com). Rates: from $59.

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

Fleur de Lys, 777 Sutter St., Union Square (✆ **415/673-7779;** www.fleurdelyssf.com), serves formal French cuisine in a romantic dining room. Three-course menu: $72. Whimsical **Farallon,** 450 Post St., Union Square (✆ **415/956-6969;** www.farallonrestaurant.com), offers high-priced seafood amid an orgy of oceanic artwork, from jellyfish lamps to sea urchin chandeliers. Main courses: $30 to $39. San Francisco's finest seafood restaurant might be **Aqua,** 252 California St. (✆ **415/956-9662;** www.aqua-sf.com), which dazzles customers with artfully composed and delicately decadent dishes like Alaskan black cod wrapped in smoked bacon with tomato-and-date chutney. Main courses: $29 to $39.

For a totally classic San Francisco dining experience, stop by the **Swan Oyster Depot,** 1517 Polk St. (✆ **415/673-1101**). Opened in 1912, this tiny hole in the wall is little more than a narrow fish market that decided to slap down 20 or so bar stools, all jammed cheek-by-jowl along a long marble bar. The menu is limited to fresh crab, shrimp, oyster, clam cocktails, a few types of smoked fish, Maine lobster, and Boston-style clam chowder, all exceedingly fresh. ***Note:*** Don't let the lunchtime line dissuade you—it moves fast. Clams and oysters on the half shell: $10 per half-dozen (cash only). Closed Sunday.

North Beach, San Francisco's Italian quarter, stretches from Montgomery and Jackson to Bay Street. It's one of the best places in the city to grab a coffee, pull up a cafe chair, and do some serious people-watching. Nightlife is equally happening; restaurants, bars, and clubs along Columbus and Grant avenues attract folks from all over the Bay Area, who fight for a parking place and romp through the festive neighborhood. Gourmands and everyday diners alike squeeze into **Tommaso's,** 1042 Kearny St. (✆ **415/398-9696;** www.tommasosnorthbeach.com), for killer pizza and a no-frills Italian cafe atmosphere. Main courses: $14 to $20; pizzas: $16 to $26. **Pasta Pomodoro,** 655 Union St. (✆ **415/399-0300;** www.pastapomodoro.com), serves heaping plates of fresh pasta at penny-pinching prices. It has several other locations around town as well. Main courses: $9 to $13. Among the area's coffeehouses, we love the authentic atmosphere at **Mario's Bohemian Cigar Store,** 566 Columbus Ave. (✆ **415/362-0536**), and **Caffè Trieste,** 601 Vallejo St. (✆ **415/392-6739;** www.caffetrieste.com).

Want a little more atmosphere and more sophisticated Italian cooking? Head to **Delfina,** 3621 18th St., in the Mission District (✆ **415/552-4055;** www.delfinasf.com). Main courses: $13 to $26. For great Greek food, try **Kokkari,** 200 Jackson St. (✆ **415/981-0983;** www.kokkari.com), which serves traditional Aegean dishes in a stylishly rustic interior. Main courses: $19 to $39.

For the best dim sum in the downtown area, go to cavernous **Yank Sing,** 101 Spear St. (✆ **415/957-9300;** www.yanksing.com). Confident, experienced servers take the nervousness out of novices—they're good at guessing your gastric threshold as they stop by your table with shrimp balls, pork buns, *congee* (porridge), spareribs, stuffed crab claws, and other palate pleasers. Most items: $3.65 to $9.30 for two to six pieces. At the Ferry Building (see "Shopping"), the **Slanted Door,** 1 Ferry Plaza (✆ **415/861-8032;** www.slanteddoor.com), is one of the most popular restaurants in the city, serving incredibly fresh and flavorful Vietnamese dishes, along with tea from an eclectic collection. Main courses: $10 to $35.

Greens Restaurant, Building A, Fort Mason Center, Marina/Pacific Heights (✆ **415/771-6222;** www.greensrestaurant.com), serves inventive vegetarian cuisine in an old waterfront warehouse, with a view of the bay and the Golden Gate Bridge. Main courses: $16 to $23.

At night, dozens of piano bars and top-notch lounges augment San Francisco's lively dance-club culture, and skyscraper lounges afford dazzling city views. The city's arts scene is also extraordinary: The opera is justifiably world renowned, the ballet is on its toes, and theaters are high in both quantity and quality. In short, there's always something going on, so get out there. For up-to-date nightlife information, turn to the ***San Francisco Weekly*** and the ***San Francisco Bay Guardian,*** both of which run comprehensive listings. They're available free at bars and restaurants and from street-corner boxes all around the city. ***Where,*** a free tourist-oriented monthly, also lists programs and performance times; it's available in most of the city's finer hotels. As for bars and lounges, there are hundreds of 'em throughout San Francisco. **Chestnut** and **Union Street** bars attract a postcollegiate crowd, **Upper Haight** caters to eclectic neighborhood cocktailers, and **Lower Haight** draws snowboarder types. Tourists mix with theatergoers and thirsty businesspeople in **downtown** pubs, while the **Castro** caters to gay locals and visitors.

17 Seattle, Washington

There's an argument to be made that the Pacific Northwest is *the* place to be in the U.S. right now. It's got money (thank you, Microsoft and Intel), it's got a slew of new residents, it's an early adopter of green technologies and lifestyles, and as a result of all this, it's geekily hip. That goes double for Seattle, the Northwest's biggest city, which over the past decade has been spiffed up with new sports stadiums, a new and architecturally avant-garde library, a new opera house and symphony hall, and countless new hotels, restaurants, and shops. It's very much a water-oriented city, set between Puget Sound and Lake Washington, with Lake Union in the center. Practically everywhere you look, the views are of sailboats, cargo ships, ferries, windsurfers, and anglers. The only drawback is the rain, which falls (or threatens to) an average of 226 days a year. But look on the bright side: All that moisture is good for your complexion.

After decades in the shadow of nearby Vancouver, British Columbia, Seattle finally emerged a few years back as a major port of embarkation for Alaska-bound ships, which operate from here throughout the summer.

GETTING TO SEATTLE & THE PORT

Cruise ships dock at Pier 66, the **Bell Street Terminal,** right in downtown Seattle near Pike Place Market, or at the **Terminal 91** cruise facility, located at 2001 W. Garfield St. at the north end of the downtown waterfront. See **www.portseattle.org/seaport/cruise/** for maps and other information. If you're arriving by air, you'll fly into the **Seattle-Tacoma International Airport** (✆ **800/544-1965;** www.portseattle.org/seatac/), often referred to as **Sea-Tac,** situated about 14 miles south of Seattle and connected to the city by I-5. Generally, allow 30 minutes for the trip between the airport and downtown. A **taxi** downtown will cost you around $35, or you can take the **Seattle Downtown Airporter** (✆ **800/426-7532;** www.graylineofseattle.com) for $11 one-way, $18 round-trip. Another option is **Shuttle Express** (✆ **425/981-7000;** www.shuttleexpress.com), which charges about $27 for two people going downtown or to either of the cruise piers.

If you're arriving by car, you'll likely come in on I-5, which leads right downtown. Alaskan Way runs along the waterfront and past the cruise ship terminal. Parking is $18 per day at the Bell Street Terminal, $20 per day at Terminal 91.

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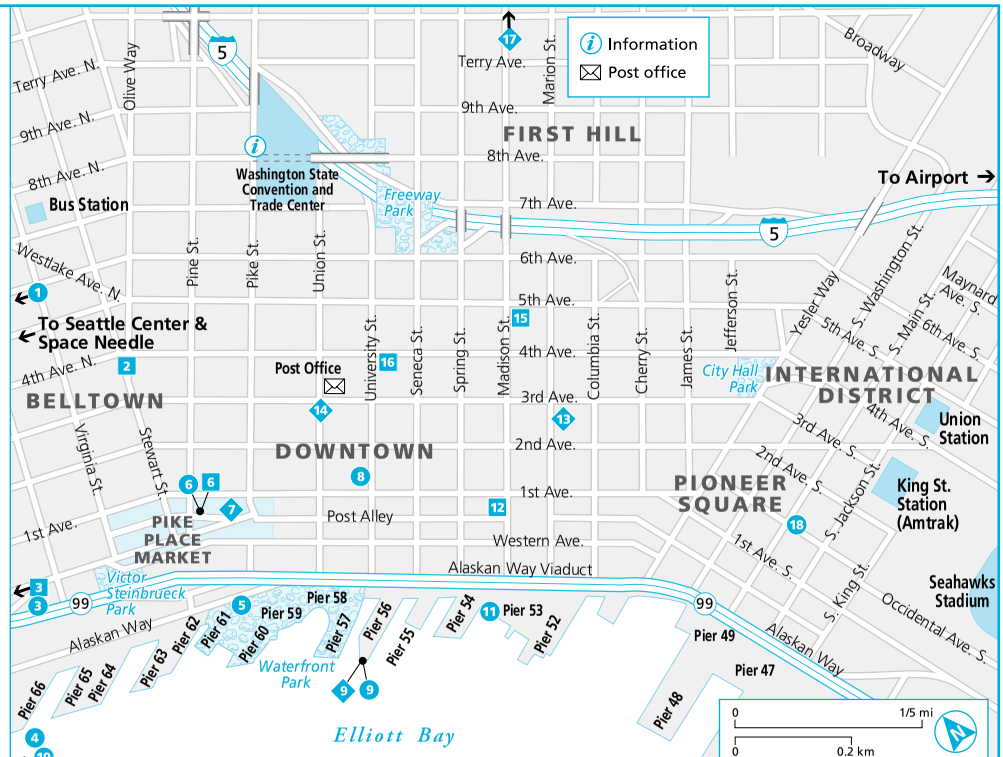


Seattle

GETTING AROUND You can walk or take public transportation around downtown Seattle, but if you want a **rental car,** nearly every major company has an outlet at Sea-Tac. **Seattle Metro** (✆ **206/553-3000;** http://transit.metrokc.gov) provides free bus transportation within the downtown area (from Battery St. to S. Jackson St. north-south and from 6th Ave. to the waterfront east-west) between the hours of 6am and 7pm. The company also operates a waterfront service using old-fashioned streetcars, some in the ride-free area, some outside. The most it will cost you is $2.50 one-way. On weekends and holidays, you can also get a 1-day unlimited-ride pass for $4 at various locations (see website for details). Visitors to the Space Needle can use the **Seattle Center Monorail** (✆ **206/905-2600;** www.seattlemonorail.com) from downtown, 1¼ miles away, for $2 one-way.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Shore excursions in Seattle are usually pretty sparse. Often your choices are limited to a **bus tour** ($49; 3½ hr.) that includes the Space Needle, Pioneer Square, and shopping time at Pike Place Market.

EXPLORING SEATTLE ON YOUR OWN

The **Seattle Waterfront,** along Alaskan Way from Yesler Way North to Bay Street and Myrtle Edwards Park, is the city's single most popular attraction, and much like San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf area, that's both good and bad. Yes, it's very touristy, with tacky gift shops, saltwater taffy, T-shirts galore, and lots of overpriced restaurants, but it's also home to the Seattle Aquarium, the Pike Place Market and its many vendors (see "Shopping," below), and a whole lot of scenery.

Located at Pier 59, the **Seattle Aquarium,** 1483 Alaskan Way (✆ **206/386-4300;** www.seattleaquarium.org), has well-designed exhibits dealing with the water worlds of the Puget Sound region. The underwater dome is the aquarium's largest and most amazing exhibit, a round undersea room (accessible via a short tunnel) where visitors are surrounded by a fish-filled 400,000-gallon tank. Admission is $16 adults, $11 kids, plus extra for special exhibits.

At Pier 57, the **Bay Pavilion** (www.pier57seattle.com) has a vintage carousel and a video arcade nestled among shops and restaurants. At Piers 55 and 56, boats leave for 1½-hour harbor cruises, as well as trips to **Tillicum Village,** a faux Northwest Native longhouse built for the 1962 Seattle World's Fair, located at Blake Island State Marine Park, across Puget Sound. It's a beautiful spot. **Tillicum Village Tours** (✆ **800/426-1205** or 206/933-8600; www.tillicumvillage.com) bundles a cruise on Puget Sound with a lunch or dinner of alder-smoked salmon and a performance of traditional masked dances. The 4-hour tour costs $80 adults, $30 kids. At **Pier 54,** you'll find companies offering sea-kayak tours, sport-fishing trips, jet-boat tours, and bicycle rentals.

The **Seattle Art Museum,** 1300 First Ave. (at University St.) (✆ **206/654-3100;** www.seattleartmuseum.org), is a repository for everything from old masters and Andy Warhol to African masks and one of the nation's premier collections of Northwest Coast Indian art. It reopened in 2007 after an expansion that added 70% more gallery space. Its entrance is unmistakable, fronted by Jonathan Borofsky's giant, kinetic *Hammering Man* sculpture. Admission is $15 for adults, $9 for teens 13 to 17, free for kids 12 and under. One mile northwest along the waterfront, the museum's **Olympic Sculpture Park,** 2901 Western Ave. at Broad Street, is a 9-acre outdoor site, opened in 2007, where world-class sculpture (by the likes of Richard Serra, Alexander Calder,

Mark Di Suvero, and Tony Smith) sits amid lawns planted with native ground cover, all with wide views of the Olympic Mountains and Puget Sound. It's a stunning spot, and admission is free.

To the west, **Seattle Center** was the epicenter of the 1962 World's Fair and is still home to the fair's futuristic **Space Needle,** 203 Sixth Ave. N. (✆ **206/905-2100;** www.spaceneedle.com), a 607-foot tower that's become the quintessential symbol of Seattle. At 518 feet above ground level, the views from its observation deck are stunning. High-powered telescopes let you zoom in on distant sights, and there's a lounge and two very expensive restaurants inside. Admission is $16 adults, $9 kids ages 4 to 13. Next door, the Frank Gehry–designed building that looks like it's in the process of melting is home to the **Experience Music Project** and the **Science Fiction Museum and Hall of Fame** (✆ **877/367-7361;** www.empsfm.org). Inside, the music part of the building has displays, interactive music rooms, performance spaces, galleries, and research facilities dedicated to all phases of American popular music, while the Sci-Fi Museum holds artifacts spanning the history of science fiction, in print, film, and TV. Admission is $15 adults, $12 kids ages 5 to 17, free for kids 4 and under.

SHOPPING

Inland from the waterfront, between Pike and Pine streets at First Avenue, the historic **Pike Place Market** (✆ **206/682-7453;** www.pikeplacemarket.org) was originally a farmers' market and is now a National Historic District, home to more than 200 local craftspeople and artists who sell their creations here throughout the year. It's one of the city's great destinations for both locals and visitors, loaded with excellent restaurants and shops and ornamented by street performers. Beginning in spring 2009, the market will be undergoing an extensive 4-year renovation designed to shore up its century-old buildings and modernize their systems. Some areas of the market and some shops may be closed temporarily during different phases of construction.

To the east, **Ye Olde Curiosity Shop,** 1001 Alaskan Way (✆ **206/682-5844;** www.yeoldecuriosityshop.com), is a cross between a souvenir store and *Ripley's Believe It or Not.* It's weird! It's tacky! It's always packed! See Siamese-twin calves, a natural mummy, the Lord's Prayer on a grain of rice, a narwhal tusk, shrunken heads, and a 67-pound snail. The collection of oddities was started by Joe Standley in 1899. Oh, and they sell a lot of wacky stuff, too.

The corner of **Pine Street** and **Fifth Avenue** is ground zero for upscale Seattle shopping, home to two major department stores (**Nordstrom** and **Macy's**) and two upscale urban shopping malls (**Westlake Center** and **Pacific Place**). Other boutiques fan out to the east and south.

South of downtown, the historic **Pioneer Square** area has the city's greatest concentration of art galleries (some of which specialize in Native-American art), along with a great bookstore (the **Elliot Bay Book Co.;** www.elliottbaybook.com), the country's largest concentration of **Victorian-Romanesque architecture,** and a lot of bars (see "Dining & Nightlife," below).

WHERE TO STAY

In an enviable location halfway between Pike Place Market and Pioneer Square and only 2 blocks from the waterfront, the **Alexis Hotel,** 1007 First Ave., at Madison Street (✆ **866/356-8894** or 206/624-4844; www.alexishotel.com), part of the Kimpton group of boutique hotels, is a sparkling gem with a pleasant mix of classic styling

and a friendly staff. Rates: from $280. The **Fairmont Olympic Hotel,** 411 University St. (✆ **888/363–5022** or 206/621-1700; www.fairmont.com/seattle), is one of the bigger, and absolutely one of the most elegant, hotels in Seattle, reminiscent of an Italian Renaissance palace. Rates: from $329.

The **Edgewater Hotel,** 2411 Alaskan Way, at Pier 67 (✆ **800/624-0670;** www.edgewaterhotel.com), may look like a mountain lodge, but it's actually right on the water, built on Pier 67 over the waters of Elliott Bay, right downtown. Rooms have rustic lodgepole-pine furniture; the lobby affords gorgeous sunset views. Rates: from $403.

Renaissance Seattle, 515 Madison St. (✆ **800/546-9184;** www.renaissancehotels.com), has larger-than-average rooms, many with views of either Puget Sound or the Cascade Range. Rates: from $224. If shopping or sipping martinis is your thing, stay at the **Mayflower Park Hotel,** 405 Olive Way (✆ **800/426-5100;** www.mayflowerpark.com), built in 1927, connected to the upscale shops of Westlake Center, and flanked by Nordstrom and Macy's. The hotel's Oliver's Lounge also serves Seattle's best martinis. Rates: from $195. The **Inn at the Market,** 86 Pine St. (✆ **800/446-4484** or 206/443-3600; www.innatthemarket.com), meanwhile, is situated right at Pike Place Market, providing an understated European atmosphere, spacious accommodations, proximity to restaurants and shopping, and views of Elliott Bay from its rooftop deck. Rates: from $190.

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

In a quiet corner of Pike Place Market, **Chez Shea,** 94 Pike St. (✆ **206/467-9990;** www.chezshea.com), has candlelit tables, subdued lighting, views of ferries crossing the bay, and superb meals. It all adds up to the perfect combination for a romantic dinner. Main courses: $20 to $34. Closed Monday.

If you're feeling above it all, pick a restaurant to match. **SkyCity at the Needle,** in the Space Needle at 400 Broad St. (✆ **800/937-9582** or 206/905-2100; www.spaceneedle.com/restaurant), has the best views in Seattle. Simply prepared steaks and seafood make up the bulk of the menu. Main courses: $34 to $54. At **Rover's,** 2808 E. Madison St. (✆ **206/325-7442;** www.rovers-seattle.com), chef Thierry Rautureau combines his love of local ingredients with classic French training to produce a distinctive take on Northwest cuisine. Main courses: $16 to $27.

For waterfront dining, head to the Edgewater Hotel's **Six-Seven Restaurant & Lounge,** 2411 Alaskan Way, at Pier 67 (✆ **206/269-4575;** www.edgewaterhotel.com), which provides superb food, very cool decor, a great little deck, and one of the best views from any restaurant in the city. Main courses: $26 to $45. Another waterfront option, **Palisade,** Elliott Bay Marina, 2601 W. Marina Place (✆ **206/285-1000;** www.palisaderestaurant.com), has a 180-degree view that takes in Elliott Bay, downtown, and West Seattle. Never mind that it also has great food and some of the most memorable decor of any Seattle restaurant. Main courses: $26 to $65. For the best selection of oysters, head to **Elliott's,** 1201 Alaskan Way, Pier 56 (✆ **206/623-4340;** www.elliottsoysterhouse.com), where the oyster bar can have as many as 20 varieties of oysters. Main courses: $15 to $42.

Wild Ginger, 1401 Third Ave. (✆ **206/623-4450;** www.wildginger.net), is a longtime Seattle favorite, serving Pan-Asian specialties in a stylish and usually very busy setting. Pull up a comfortable stool around the large satay grill and watch the cooks grill little skewers of anything from chicken to scallops to pork to lamb. Main courses: $15 to $30. For the best steaks, go to **Metropolitan Grill,** 820 Second Ave.

(✆ **206/624-3287;** www.themetropolitangrill.com), which serves corn-fed, aged beef grilled over mesquite charcoal. Main courses: $23 to $82.

Much of Seattle's evening entertainment scene is clustered in the **Seattle Center** and **Pioneer Square** areas, the former hosting theater, opera, and classical-music performances, the latter a bar-and-nightclub district. Seattle Center is home of the Space Needle and several performance halls for the Seattle Opera and the Seattle Symphony. Pioneer Square, centered around the corner of First Avenue and Yesler Way, is known for its restored 1890s buildings, tree-lined streets, and cobblestone plazas, plus a plethora of restaurants and bars.

18 Tampa, Florida

Tampa was a sleepy port until Cuban immigrants founded **Ybor City**'s cigar industry in the 1880s. A few years later, Henry B. Plant built a railroad to carry tourists into town and constructed his garish Tampa Bay Hotel (now the Henry B. Plant Museum). During the Spanish-American War, Teddy Roosevelt trained his Rough Riders here and walked the Ybor City streets with Cuban revolutionary José Marti. A land boom in the 1920s gave the city its charming, Victorian-style **Hyde Park** suburb (now a gentrified area, just across the Hillsborough River from downtown), and the go-go 1980s and 1990s brought skyscrapers, a convention center, a performing-arts center, and lots of shopping and dining options to the **downtown** area.

On the western shore of Tampa Bay, **St. Petersburg** is the picturesque and pleasant flip side of Tampa's busy business, industrial, and shipping life. Originally conceived and built primarily for tourists and wintering snowbirds, it's got a nice downtown area, some quality museums, and a few good restaurants.

The Port of Tampa is set amid a complicated network of channels and harbors near historic Ybor City and its deep-water Ybor Channel. Ships sailing from here head primarily to the western Caribbean, the Yucatán, and Central America.

GETTING TO TAMPA & THE PORT

Tampa's cruise terminals are all situated along Channelside Drive, close to the heart of the city. They're operated by the **Tampa Port Authority** (✆ **813/905-7678;** www.tampaport.com). If you're coming by air, you'll probably land at **Tampa International Airport** (✆ **813/870-8700;** www.tampaairport.com), 5 miles west of downtown Tampa, near the junction of S.R. 60 and Memorial Highway. If you haven't arranged transfers with your cruise line, the port is an easy 30-minute **taxi** ride away; the set fare is $22 per car for up to four people.

By car, Tampa lies 188 miles southwest of Jacksonville, 50 miles north of Sarasota, and 245 miles northwest of Miami. From I-75 and I-4 to Terminals 2 and 6, take I-4 west to exit 1 (Ybor City), go south on 21st Street, turn right on Adamo Drive (Hwy. 60), and then go left on Channelside Drive. For Terminal 7, go south on 21st Street (21st St. merges with 22nd St. after crossing Adamo Dr.), turn right on Maritime Boulevard, and then go left on Guy N. Verger to Hooker's Point. Parking at the port costs $12 per day.

GETTING AROUND Taxis in Tampa do not normally cruise the streets for fares; instead, they line up at public loading places, such as the airport, cruise terminal, and major hotels. **Yellow Cab** (✆ **813/253-0121**) and **United Cab** (✆ **813/253-2424**) charge $2 at flag fall, plus $2.25 for each mile thereafter. Should you wish to drive

your own vehicle, all major **car-rental** companies have counters at the airport. The transportation situation has gotten somewhat better, not to mention nostalgic, with the 2⅓-mile **TECO Line Street Car System** (✆ **813/254-HART** [254-4278]; www.tecolinestreetcar.org), complete with newer but old-fashioned streetcars and overhead power lines, which hauls passengers between downtown and Ybor City via the St. Pete Times Forum, Channelside, Garrison Seaport, and the Florida Aquarium. The cars run every 30 minutes; one-way fares are $2.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Tampa City Tour ($42, 4 hr.): This tour visits Ybor City and the Ybor State Museum, and passes the University of Tampa and Hyde Park on the way to the airport.

BUSCH GARDENS

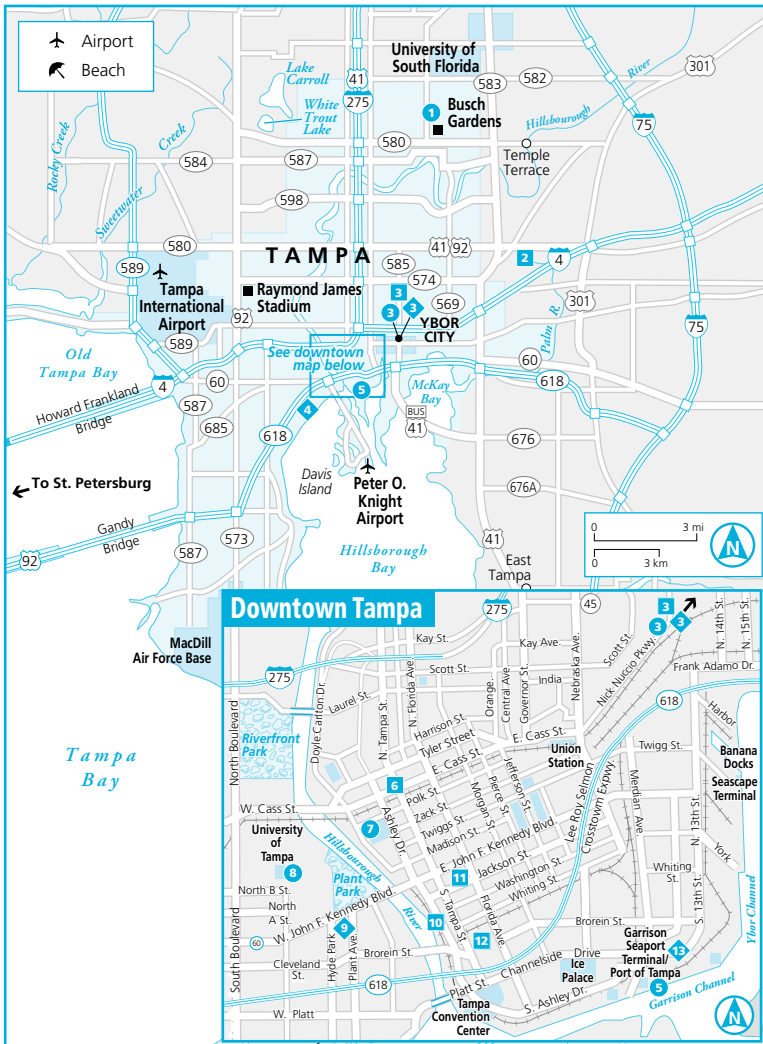
Admission prices are high, but **Busch Gardens Africa,** 3000 E. Busch Blvd., at McKinley Drive/North 40th Street (✆ **888/800-5447;** www.buschgardens.com), remains Tampa Bay's most popular attraction. The 335-acre family entertainment park features thrill rides, animal habitats, live entertainment, shops, restaurants, and games. The park's zoo ranks among the best in the country, with nearly 3,400 animals.

The park has eight areas, each with its own theme, animals, live entertainment, thrill rides, kiddie attractions, dining, and shopping. A Skyride cable car soars over the park, offering a bird's-eye view of it all. Turn left after the main gate and head to **Morocco,** a walled city with exotic architecture, crafts demonstrations, a sultan's tent with snake charmers, and an exhibit featuring alligators and turtles. The Moorish-style Moroccan Palace Theater features an ice show that many families consider to be the park's best entertainment for both adults and children. You can also attend a song-and-dance show in the Marrakesh Theater. Overlooking it all is the Crown Colony Restaurant, the park's largest.

After watching the snake charmers, walk east past Anheuser-Busch's fabled Clydesdale horses to **Egypt,** where you can visit King Tut's tomb with its replicas of the real treasures and listen to comedian Martin Short narrate Akbar's Adventure Tours, a wacky simulator that "transports" one and all across Egypt via camel, biplane, and mine car. The whole room moves on this ride, which lasts only 5 minutes—much less time than the usual wait to get inside. Youngsters can dig for their own ancient treasures in a sand area. Adults and kids 54 inches or taller can ride Montu, the tallest and longest inverted roller coaster in the world, with seven upside-down loops. Your feet dangle loose on Montu, so make sure your shoes are tied tightly and your lunch has had time to digest.

From Egypt, walk to the **Edge of Africa,** the most unique of the park's eight areas, and home to most of the large animals. Go immediately to the Expedition Africa Gift Shop and try to get on one of the park's zoologist-led wildlife tours.

Next stop is **Nairobi,** the most beautiful part of the park, where you can see gorillas and chimpanzees in their lush rainforest habitat in the Myombe Reserve. Nairobi also has a baby-animal nursery, a petting zoo, turtle and reptile displays, an elephant exhibit (alas, the magnificent creatures seem to be bored to the point of madness), and Curiosity Caverns, where bats, reptiles, and small mammals that are active in the dark are kept in cages (it's the most traditional zoolike area here). The entry to Rhino Rally, the park's safari adventure, is at the western end of Nairobi.



CRUISE TERMINAL 5

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Now head to the **Congo,** where the highlights are the rare white Bengal tigers that live on Claw Island. The Congo is also home to Kumba, the largest and fastest roller coaster in the southeastern United States (54-in. minimum height for riders), and the Congo River Rapids, where you're turned loose in round boats that float down the swiftly flowing "river" (42-in. minimum)—you will get drenched (and refreshed on a hot day). Bumper cars and kiddie rides can be found here, too.

From the Congo, walk south into **Stanleyville,** a prototype African village, with a shopping bazaar, orangutans living on an island, and the Stanleyville Theater, featuring shows for children. Two more water rides here are the Tanganyika Tidal Wave (48-in. minimum height for riders), where you'll come to a very damp end, and the Stanley Falls Flume (an aquatic version of a roller coaster). Also, the picnic-style Stanleyville Smokehouse serves ribs and chicken—some of the best chow in the park.

Up next is **Land of the Dragons,** the most entertaining area for small children. They can spend the day enjoying a variety of entertainment in a fairy-tale setting, plus just-for-kids rides. The area is dominated by Dumphrey, a whimsical dragon who interacts with visitors and guides children around a three-story treehouse with winding stairways, tall towers, stepping stones, illuminated water geysers, and an echo chamber.

The next stop is **Bird Gardens,** the park's original core, offering rich foliage, lagoons, and a free-flight aviary for hundreds of exotic birds, including golden and American bald eagles. Be sure to see the Florida flamingos and Australian koalas while you're here.

If your stomach can take another hair-raising ride, try **Gwazi** (48-in. minimum for riders), an adrenaline-pumping attraction in which a pair of old-fashioned wooden roller coasters (named the Lion and the Tiger) start simultaneously and whiz within a few feet of each other six times as they roar along at 50 mph and rise to 90 feet. If you want to experience the park's fifth roller coaster, head to **Timbuktu** and climb aboard the **Scorpion,** a high-speed number with a 60-foot drop and 360-degree loop (42-in. height minimum). Or if you're really crazy, check out the floorless **SheiKra,** where for 200 feet up and 90 degrees straight down, you can view the world—from a floorless perspective. For visual amusement, there's ***Pirates 4-D,*** an animated "4-D" special effects movie and theater production starring comedic actor Leslie Nielsen. Opened in 2008, **Jungala** is a 4-acre attraction in the Congo area that features exotic creatures, animal interactions, multistory family play areas, rides, and live entertainment.

Added attractions are a $350, 6-hour zookeeper-for-a-day program and a "4-D" multisensory R. L. Stine film. You can exchange foreign currency in the park, and interpreters are available.

To get here, take I-275 northeast of downtown to Busch Boulevard (exit 33), and go east 2 miles to the entrance on 40th Street (McKinley Ave.). Admission is $70 for adults and $60 for kids 3 to 9. Parking is $9. The park is open 10am to 6pm, with hours usually extended during summer and on holidays. See the website for exact opening and closing times.

EXPLORING THE REST OF TAMPA ON YOUR OWN

Tampa is best explored by car, as only the commercial district can be covered on foot. If you want to go to the beach, you'll have to head to neighboring St. Petersburg. **Ybor City,** Tampa's historic Latin enclave and one of only three National Historic Districts in Florida, lies only a mile or so from the cruise ship docks. Once known as the cigar

capital of the world, Ybor provides a charming slice of the past with its Spanish architecture, antique street lamps, wrought-iron balconies, ornate grillwork, and renovated cigar factories. Stroll along Seventh Avenue, the main artery (closed to traffic at night), where you'll find cigar shops, boutiques, nightclubs, and the famous 100-year-old Columbia Restaurant (see "Dining & Nightlife," below). The **Ybor City Museum State Park,** 1818 Ninth Ave., between 18th and 19th streets (✆ **813/247-6323;** www.ybormuseum.org), is primarily devoted to the area's cigar history, with a collection of cigar labels, cigar memorabilia, and works by local artisans. Admission is $3 and walking tours cost $6.

With 13 silver minarets and distinctive Moorish architecture, the stunning **Henry B. Plant Museum,** 401 W. Kennedy Blvd. (✆ **813/254-1891;** www.plantmuseum.com), is the focal point of the Tampa skyline. This national historic landmark, built in 1891 as the Tampa Bay Hotel, is filled with European and Oriental furnishings and decorative arts from the original hotel collection. Admission is $5; closed Monday.

The permanent collection of the **Tampa Museum of Art,** 600 N. Ashley Dr. (✆ **813/274-8732;** www.tampamuseum.com), is especially strong in ancient Greek, Etruscan, and Roman artifacts, as well as 20th-century art. As this book went to press, the museum was being revamped into a 66,000-square-foot museum with five expansive interior galleries (with innovative translucent ceilings) and one exterior sculpture gallery. Completion is expected in November 2009.

If you want to see one of the country's largest and busiest ports in action, the **Port Authority of Tampa** (✆ **813/905-5131**) gives a free 1½-hour tour around Tampa Bay. The 45-passenger *SeePort Adventure* catamaran departs from Terminal 2 Monday through Friday at 9:30am. Reservations are suggested at least 2 weeks in advance.

BEACHES

You have to start at **St. Petersburg,** across the bay, for a north-to-south string of interconnected white sandy shores. Most beaches have restrooms, refreshment stands, and picnic areas. You can park either on the street at a meter (usually 25¢ for each half-hr.) or at one of the four major parking lots situated, from north to south, at: **Sand Key Park,** in Clearwater, beside Gulf Boulevard (also known as Rte. 699), just south of the Clearwater Pass Bridge; **Redington Shores Beach Park,** beside Gulf Boulevard at 182nd Street; **Treasure Island Park,** on Gulf Boulevard just north of 108th Avenue; and **St. Pete Beach Park,** beside Gulf Boulevard at 46th Street.

SHOPPING

The most distinctive shopping here is in Ybor City. The area is no longer the major producer of hand-rolled cigars it once was, but you can still watch artisans making stogies at the **Gonzalez y Martinez Cigar Factory/Columbia Cigar Store,** 2103 Seventh Ave., in the Columbia Restaurant building (✆ **813/247-2469**). Rollers are on duty Monday through Saturday. You can also stock up on fine domestic and imported cigars at **El Sol,** 1728 E. Seventh Ave. (✆ **813/248-5905**), the city's oldest cigar store; **King Corona Cigar Factory,** 1523 E. Seventh Ave. (✆ **813/241-9109**); and **Metropolitan Cigars & Wine,** 2014 E. Seventh Ave. (✆ **813/248-3304**).

WHERE TO STAY

All of the hotels listed in this section are in downtown Tampa or Ybor City.

The modern, four-story **Hilton Garden Inn,** 1700 E. Ninth Ave. (✆ **800/445-8667;** www.hiltongardeninn.com), is primarily oriented to business travelers, but

it's just 2 blocks north of the heart of Ybor City's dining and entertainment district. Rates: from $149. The **Hyatt Regency Tampa,** Two Tampa City Center at 211 N. Tampa St. (✆ **800/233-1234;** http://tamparegency.hyatt.com), sits in Tampa's commercial center and also caters mostly to the corporate crowd. Rates: from $159. The **Tampa Marriott Waterside Hotel & Marina,** 700 S. Florida Ave. (✆ **800/228-9290;** www.marriott.com), has a lot of rooms with balconies overlooking the bay or city (the best views are high up on the south side). Rates: from $179.

If the slots on the ship aren't enough for you, the 500-room **Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino,** 5223 Orient Rd. (✆ **866/502-7529;** www.seminolehardrocktampa.com), has a 130,000-square-foot casino plus several other grand features—stay here if you're looking for lots of excitement. Rates: from $169.

For a special experience farther from the cruise docks, the **Renaissance Vinoy Resort & Golf Club,** 501 Fifth Ave. N.E., at Beach Drive, St. Petersburg (✆ **888/303-4430;** www.renaissancehotels.com), is the grande dame of the region's hotels. Built as the Vinoy Park in 1925, this elegant Spanish-style establishment reopened in 1992 after a meticulous $93-million restoration. Many rooms have lovely views of Tampa Bay. Accommodations in the newer wing (the Tower) are slightly larger than those in the hotel's original core. Rates: from $199.

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

Nightfall transforms **Ybor City,** Tampa's century-old Latin Quarter, into a hotbed of ethnic food, music, poetry readings, and after-midnight coffee and dessert. The nearly 100-year-old **Columbia Restaurant,** 2117 Seventh Ave. E. (✆ **813/248-4961**), occupies an attractive tile-sheathed building that fills an entire city block between 21st and 22nd streets, about a mile from the cruise docks. The aura is pre-Castro Cuba, and the simpler your dish is, the better it's likely to be. Filet mignon and roasted pork, as well as the black beans, yellow rice, and plantains are flavorful and well prepared. Catch a flamenco show on the dance floor Monday through Saturday. Main courses: $15 to $30. After dinner, all you have to do is stroll along Seventh Avenue East, between 15th and 20th streets, and you'll hear music blaring out of the clubs that change names and characters frequently. Just follow your ears into the one that sounds best to you. With all of the sidewalk seating, it's easy to judge what the clientele is like, too. At **Centro Ybor,** a shopping/entertainment complex between Seventh and Eighth avenues and 15th and 17th streets (✆ **813/242-4660;** www.centroybor.com), you'll find a multiscreen cineplex, several restaurants, a comedy club, a large open-air bar, and a bunch of typical mall-type stores. The Ybor City Chamber of Commerce has its **Cigar Museum & Visitor Center** here, too, on Eighth Avenue next to Centro Español.

Although Ybor City is better known, Tampa's trendiest dining scene is actually along South Howard Avenue, between West Kennedy Boulevard and the bay in affluent Hyde Park. That's where you'll find **Mise en Place,** 442 W. Kennedy Blvd., opposite the University of Tampa (✆ **813/254-5373;** www.miseonline.com), run by chef Marty Blitz and his wife, Maryann, the culinary darlings of Tampa since 1986. They present the freshest of ingredients on a creative, eclectic menu that changes weekly. Main courses: $19 to $33. Hyde Park is also the home of **Bern's Steak House,** 1208 S. Howard Ave. (✆ **813/251-2421**), whose steaks are close to perfect. You order according to thickness and weight. Main courses: $17 to $60. Close by, **Restaurant BT,** 1633 W. Snow Ave. (✆ **813/258-1916;** www.restaurantbt.com), deserves every

bit of the massive hype it's received lately, serving French-Vietnamese fare that's as gorgeous as it is delicious, and the place has a sophisticated, stylish ambience to boot. Main courses: $18 to $29.

Within steps of the cruise ship piers, the shopping, dining, and entertainment complex known as **Channelside,** 615 Channelside Dr., adjacent to the Florida Aquarium (✆ **813/223-4250;** www.channelsidetampa.com), continues to grow. Worthwhile eateries here include Grill 29, Stumps Supper Club, and Tinatapas.

19 Vancouver, British Columbia

Situated in the extreme southwestern corner of British Columbia, Vancouver is probably one of the "newest" cities you'll ever visit, and it's certainly one of the most cosmopolitan. Across its skyline are new glass-and-steel high-rises and a medley of foreign tongues testify to the city's international character. There's a youthfulness, too, a certain Pacific Northwest chic that consists of equal parts movie-biz buzz (the city has been a setting for so many movies that it's sometimes called "Hollywood North") and pure wonderment over living in such a beautiful, vibrant place. It's everything a small city should be: both majestic and intimate, bustling and laid back, sophisticated and free spirited, with a wealth of natural beauty all around, from the wide waters of Burrard Inlet to the deep green woods of Stanley Park (one of the world's largest urban parks) to the snow-capped mountains in the north. Rich Northwest Coast Native culture, a thriving Asian community, numerous summertime festivals, and a great arts scene fill out the picture. What's more, those Vancouverites are just so blatantly *nice.* Maybe it's all that fresh air. Who knows, but it makes us want to move here every time we visit.

Though Seattle has usurped some of Vancouver's cruise steam over the past several years, Vancouver is still the major southern embarkation port for Alaska cruises, and it's occasionally a port of call as well.

For much of 2008, U.S. and Canadian dollars were essentially equal in value. In 2009, though, the U.S. dollar had gained in strength, with C$1 = US83¢ (another way to say the same thing: US$1 buys C$1.20). Exchange rates fluctuate, however, so prices may not be exactly the same when you arrive in port.

GETTING TO VANCOUVER & THE PORT

Most cruise ships dock at **Canada Place,** at the end of Burrard Street (✆ **604/775-7200;** www.canadaplace.ca). The pier terminal is a city landmark designed to resemble a sailing ship setting off to sea. Next door is the new Convention Center, with its 6-acre green roof. Both buildings are at the edge of the downtown district and is just a quick stroll from the **Gastown** area, with its cafes, art galleries, and souvenir shops (see below), and from **Robson Street,** a destination for trendy fashions. Hotels, restaurants, and shops are all located right near the terminal. Most visitors arrive in Vancouver by plane, touching down at **Vancouver International Airport** (✆ **604/207-7077;** www.yvr.ca), 8 miles south of downtown. The average **taxi** fare from the airport to downtown is about $23 to $26. The **YVR Airporter** (✆ **800/668-3141** or 604/946-8866; www.yvrairporter.com) buses also provide service to the city for C$14 (US$12) per person one-way or C$22 (US$18) round-trip.

GETTING AROUND You can easily walk the downtown area of Vancouver, but if you want transportation, you've got a few options. **Car-rental** agencies with local

branches include Avis, Budget, Hertz Canada, and Thrifty, and **taxis** are always found around the major hotels and tourist sites. For public transportation, the **Translink system** (✆ **604/953-3333;** www.translink.bc.ca) includes electric buses, ferries, and the magnetic-rail SkyTrain. Fares are based on a zone system: A one-zone fare is C$2.50 (US$2.10), two-zone is C$3.75 (US$3.10), and three-zone is C$5 (US$4.15). You can also get a 1-day all-zone pass for C$9 (US$7.45).

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

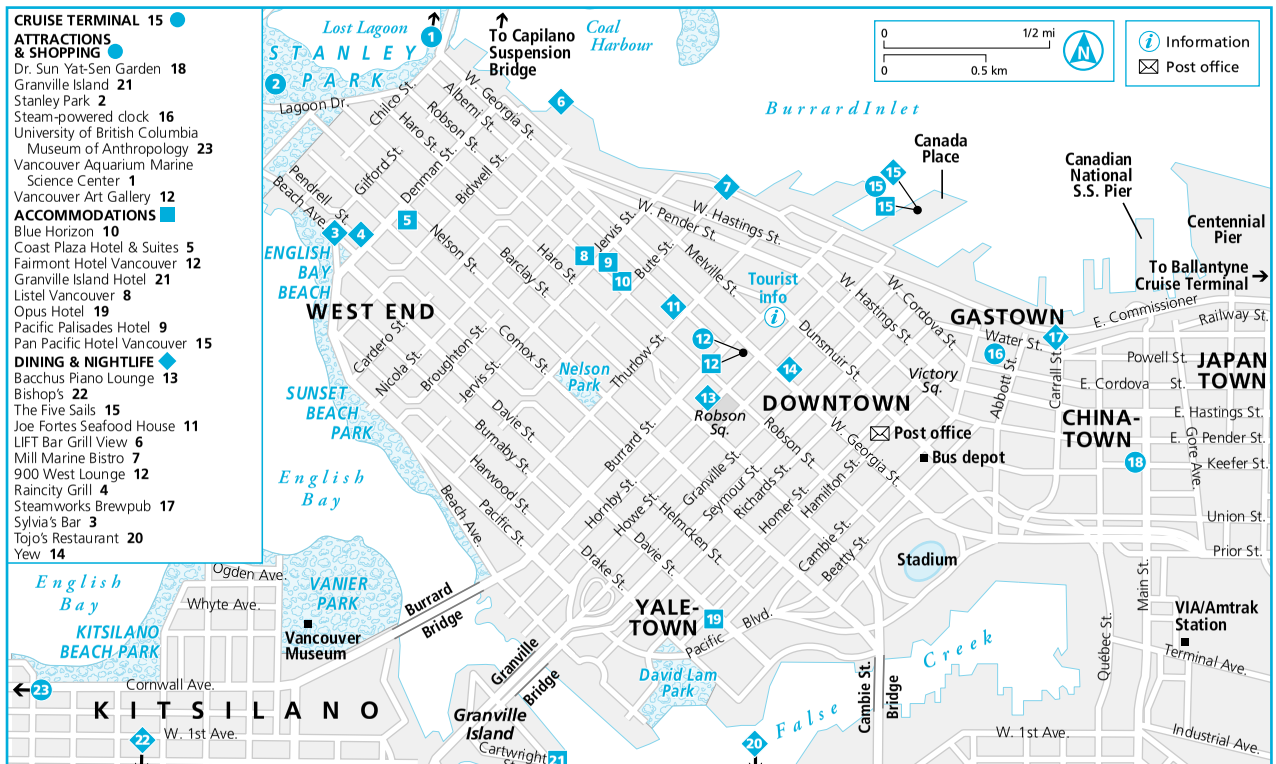
We don't recommend taking the limited (and touristy) shore excursions offered here. You'll do a lot better just seeing the city on your own.

EXPLORING VANCOUVER ON YOUR OWN

Within easy walking distance of the pier, **Gastown**—situated between the waterfront and Hastings Street, from Canbie Street to Columbia—is Vancouver's oldest neighborhood. It retains its Victorian flavor of low, shoulder-to-shoulder buildings, ornate streetlights, and cobblestone squares, now leavened by expensive condos and high-end boutiques. The area was named for "Gassy" Jack Deighton, who in 1867 built a saloon in Maple Tree Square (at the intersection of Water, Alexander, and Carrall sts.) to serve the area's loggers and trappers. The Gastown of today offers a touch of bohemia, with street musicians, galleries, boutiques, and antiques and art shops, plus lots of touristy stuff, and even more restaurants, clubs, and cafes. At the corner of Water and Cambie streets, a **steam-powered clock** draws its power from an underground steam system that heats many of downtown's buildings. It hoots the Westminster chimes every 15 minutes as steam vents from its top.

Adjoining Gastown, Vancouver's historic **Chinatown**—bordered by East Pender and Keefer streets between Carrall Street and Gore Avenue—is one of the largest in North America. Even though the vast majority of Vancouver's large Asian population has moved out, many return here to shop, keeping the area vital and lively. It's filled with bright-red low-rise buildings, photogenic Chinese gates, food, and open-air markets selling Chinese wares. Chinatown's biggest draw is the **Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden,** 578 Carrall St. (✆ **604/689-7133;** www.vancouverchinesegarden.com), a perfectly traditional Chinese garden based on the yin-yang principle, in which harmony is achieved by placing contrasting elements in juxtaposition: soft moving water against solid stone, smooth swaying bamboo around gnarled immovable rocks, dark pebbles against light pebbles, and so on. It's one of only a few classical Chinese gardens in North America (along with ones in Portland, Oregon, and Staten Island, New York, and another under development in Seattle), and was created by master artisans from Suzhou, the garden city of China. Admission is C$10 (US$8.30) adults, free for kids 4 and under. Immediately next door, separated from the garden by only a classical footbridge and koi pond, the public **Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Park** is less meditative, but beautiful in its own right, with walking paths winding among Chinese trees and foliage. Admission is free.

Downtown, the **Vancouver Art Gallery,** 750 Hornby St. (✆ **604/662-4719;** www.vanartgallery.bc.ca), is housed in a grand neoclassical building originally used as a courthouse. Its collection of more than 8,000 works is heavy on regional work (including a large collection by British Columbia native Emily Carr) and related works by other Canadian and international artists. There are also frequent large-scale temporary exhibitions. Admission is C$21 (US$17).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1/2 mi
0
0.5 km
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Canada Place
Canadian National S.S. Pier
Centennial Pier
To Ballantyne Cruise Terminal
ENGLISH BAY BEACH
WEST END
Tourist info
GASTOWN
JAPAN TOWN
CHINA-TOWN
SUNSET BEACH PARK
Nelson Park
Victory Sq.
Robson Sq.
DOWNTOWN
Post office
Bus depot
English Bay
VANIER PARK
Vancouver Museum
KITSILANO BEACH PARK
Burrard Bridge
YALE-TOWN
Stadium
Granville Bridge
Granville Island
David Lam Park
False Creek
Cambie St. Bridge
VIA/Amtrak Station
KITSILANO
Cornwall Ave.
W. 1st Ave.
Ogden Ave.
Whyte Ave.
Cartwright St.
Pacific Blvd.
Beach Ave
Hornby St.
Howe St.
Granville St.
Seymour St.
Richards St.
Homer St.
Hamilton St.
Cambie St.
Beatty St.
Burrard St.
Thurlow St.
Jervis St.
Broughton St.
Comox St.
Barclay St.
Haro St.
Nelson St.
Davie St.
Burnaby St.
Harwood St.
Pacific St.
Drake St.
Helmcken St.
Dunsmuir St.
W. Hastings St.
W. Pender St.
Melville St.
Bute St.
Jervis St.
Denman St.
Robson St.
Albernl St.
W. Georgia St.
Chilco St.
Gilford St.
Bidwell St.
Pendrell St.
Beach Ave
Cardero St.
Nicola St.
W. Cordova St.
Water St.
Carrall St.
Abbott St.
E. Commissioner
Railway St.
Powell St.
E. Cordova St.
E. Hastings St.
E. Pender St.
Keefer St.
Gore Ave.
Union St.
Prior St.
Main St.
Québec St.
Terminal Ave.
Industrial Ave.

Only about a mile from the heart of downtown Vancouver, northwest of the cruise ship terminal, the 1,000 acres of **Stanley Park** contain rose gardens, totem poles, a yacht club, a water park for kids, miles of wooded hiking trails, and great vantage points for views of Lions Gate Bridge, the suspension bridge that connects Vancouver to the north shore municipalities. The park is one of Vancouver's gems. On its grounds, the outstanding **Vancouver Aquarium Marine Science Center** (✆ **604/659-FISH** [659-3474]; www.vanaqua.org) is one of North America's largest and best, with an excellent display on the Pacific Northwest, plus sea otters, beluga whales, sea lions, and Pacific white-sided dolphins. Admission is C$25 (US$21) adults, C$17 (US$14) kids ages 4 to 12.

If you're up for a 20-minute drive west of downtown, the **University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology,** 6393 N.W. Marine Dr. (✆ **604/822-5087;** www.moa.ubc.ca), isn't just any old museum. In 1976, architect Arthur Erickson re-created a classic Native post-and-beam structure out of modern concrete and glass to house one of the world's finest collections of West Coast Native art. You enter through doors that resemble a huge, carved, bent-cedar box. Artifacts from potlatch ceremonies flank the ramp leading to the Great Hall's collection of totem poles and Haida artwork, including masterpieces by sculptor Bill Reid; other artwork and sculpture are found outdoors. Admission is C$9 (US$7.45) adults, C$7 (US$5.80) kids (free 6 and under).

SHOPPING

About 1½ miles southwest of the cruise docks, **Granville Island** (www.granville island.com) is a former industrial site with warehouses and factories that now house galleries, museums, restaurants, theaters, shops, a small brewery, and a few remaining industrial businesses to keep the place real. You could easily spend a full day here, browsing for crafts, grabbing picnic fixin's from the incredible **Public Market** (one of the best gourmet food markets we've ever seen, anywhere), strolling along the waterfront, and watching the street performers, then stay into the evening to enjoy a great dinner and catch a comedy show or theater performance. If you have a few thousand bucks to drop (or are willing to pretend you do), stop in to **Eagle Spirit Gallery,** 1803 Maritime Mews (✆ **604/801-5205;** www.eaglespiritgallery.com), which specializes in original, museum-quality Northwest Coast Native and Inuit art, including hand-carved masks, argillite stone carvings, and paintings. (Several other Native art galleries are clustered on Water St., near the cruise docks.) To get to Granville Island, walk or take a taxi south on Burrard Street from the cruise docks. At some point, make a left 1 block to Hornby Street and then continue south all the way to the end. There you'll find a dock for the **Aquabus** (✆ **604/689-5858;** www.theaquabus.com), a cute little ferry that will deposit you right by the Public Market. The one-way fare is C$3 (US$2.50) adults, C$1.50 (US$1.25) kids.

Downtown, not far inland from the cruise docks, **Robson Street** is chockablock with big international chain stores, high fashion, coffeehouses, and bistros. In Gastown, **Water Street** may be a little too heavy on the knickknack shops, but it also boasts galleries of First Nations art, funky retro boutiques, and antiques shops.

WHERE TO STAY

Virtually all of Vancouver's downtown hotels are within walking distance of shops, restaurants, and attractions.

The **Fairmont Hotel Vancouver,** 900 W. Georgia St. (✆ **800/257-7544** or 604/684-3131; www.fairmont.com), is the grande dame of Vancouver's hotels. Designed on a generous scale, with a copper roof, marble interiors, and massive proportions, the

hotel is all luxury and spaciousness, with marble bathrooms and mahogany furnishings in the guest rooms. Rates: from C$289 (US$240).

The **Pan Pacific Hotel Vancouver,** Suite 300–999 Canada Place (✆ **800/937-1515;** www.panpacific.com), sits right atop Canada Place, home of the cruise terminal and a convention center. All of the guest rooms are modern, spacious, and comfortably furnished. Try to book a harborside room so you can enjoy the view. Rates: from C$410 (US$340).

Right at the western end of the Robson Street shopping and restaurant strip are three worthwhile hotels. The **Listel Vancouver,** 1300 Robson St. (✆ **800/663-5491;** www.listel-vancouver.com), has subtly luxurious rooms and public areas adorned with quality contemporary art. In the evenings, you can hear live jazz at O'Doul's, the hotel's street-level restaurant and bar. Rates: from C$139 (US$115). Across the street, the **Pacific Palisades Hotel,** 1277 Robson St. (✆ **800/663-1815** or 604/688-0461; www.pacificpalisadeshotel.com), offers fun, lively rooms with a youthful flair. Rates: from C$225 (US$187). Just down Robson, the **Blue Horizon,** 1225 Robson St. (✆ **800/663-1333** or 604/688-1411; www.bluehorizonhotel.com), offers large rooms with comfortable if not adventurous decor, offset with some of the best views in the downtown and west end (above about the 12th floor). Rates: C$109 (US$90).

In trendy Yaletown, the 7-story **Opus Hotel,** 322 Davie St. (✆ **866/642-6787** or 604/642-6787; www.opushotel.com), is Vancouver's most stylish. Expect super-stylish decor and artwork, lots of natural light, lots of amenities, and guest international DJs performing in the super-hip lobby lounge. Rates: from C$200 (US$166).

On Granville Island, the **Granville Island Hotel,** 1253 Johnston St. (✆ **800/663-1840** or 604/683-7373; www.granvilleislandhotel.com), has a beautiful waterfront setting, pleasantly decorated rooms (some with balconies), and a lovely dining patio outside. Rates: from C$150 (US$125).

Just a few blocks from English Bay and busy Denman Street, the **Coast Plaza Hotel & Suites,** 1763 Comox St. (✆ **800/716-6199** or 604/688-7711; www.coasthotels.com/hotels/canada/bc/vancouver/coast_plaza/overview), offers unremarkable decor but a great location and amazing views from its upper floors. Rates: from C$150 (US$125).

DINING & NIGHTLIFE

The **Five Sails,** in the Pan Pacific Hotel, Suite 410–999, Canada Place Way (✆ **604/844-2855;** www.fivesails.ca), combines truly top-notch food and a killer view of Coal Harbour, the Lions Gate Bridge, and the mountains. Cuisine is an eclectic mix of Thai, Mongolian, Japanese, Vietnamese, and nouvelle influences. Main courses: C$34 to C$42 (US$28–US$35).

For something a little different, **LIFT Bar Grill View,** 333 Menchions Mews (✆ **604/689-5438;** www.liftbarandgrill.com), not only has awesome views of Coal Harbour, Stanley Park, and the North Shore mountains, but also serves small dishes, called "whet plates," to be shared. Sample fare includes such delights as venison with a chocolate-cherry demi-glace, jumbo wild prawns with seared foie gras, and Thai curry duck confit. Main courses: C$29 to C$49 (US$24–US$41); whet plates: C$11 to C$19 (US$9.15–US$16).

Joe Fortes Seafood House, 777 Thurlow St. (✆ **604/669-1940;** www.joefortes.ca), is a two-story, dark-wood restaurant with an immensely popular bar. The roof garden is pure Vancouver, and pan-roasted oysters are a menu staple. Main courses: C$28 to C$55 (US$23–US$46).

At **Bishop's,** 2183 W. Fourth Ave. (✆ **604/738-2025;** www.bishopsonline.com), owner John Bishop makes every customer feel special, and the candlelight, white linen, and soft jazz don't hurt, either. The food is even better: a mix of "contemporary home cooking" like roasted duck breast with sun-dried Okanagan Valley fruits and candied ginger glace. Main courses: C$35 to C$40 (US$29–US$33); reservations required.

For Japanese food, head to **Tojo's Restaurant,** situated above an A&W burger joint at 1133 W. Broadway (✆ **604/872-8050;** www.tojos.com). Tell owner Hidekazu Tojo how much you want to spend and he'll prepare an incredible meal to fit your budget. Main courses: C$18 to C$38 (US$15–US$32); closed Sunday; reservations required for the sushi bar.

Just off English Bay Beach in the West End, **Raincity Grill,** 1193 Denman St. (✆ **604/685-7337;** www.raincitygrill.com), was one of the first restaurants in the city to concentrate on local produce and sustainable practices. Their 100-mile Tasting Menu is just what it says: Everything is produced on farms or harvested from waters located within 100 miles of the restaurant. Main courses: C$27 to C$32 (US$22–US$27); tasting menu: C$72 (US$60).

Vancouver offers an enormous range of after-dinner venues. For a wine bar, choose the classic **900 West Lounge** at the Fairmont, 900 W. Georgia St. (✆ **604/684-3131;** www.fairmont.com) or the superstylish **Yew** at the Four Seasons, 791 W. Georgia St. (✆ **604/689-9333;** www.fourseasons.com). For a dark, woodsy piano lounge, head to the **Bacchus Piano Lounge** at the Wedgewood Hotel, 845 Hornby St. (✆ **604/689-7777;** www.wedgewoodhotel.com). Two Vancouver bars offer unmatched water views: To the south, **Sylvia's Bar** at the Sylvia Hotel, 1154 Gilford St. (✆ **604/681-9321;** www.sylviahotel.com), is a woodsy, cozy spot with views of English Bay (and its famous sunsets) through big picture windows. To the north, the **Mill Marine Bistro,** 1199 W. Cordova St. (✆ **604/687-6455;** www.millbistro.ca), is Vancouver's largest outdoor dining and drinking spot, with wonderful views of Coal Harbour and North Vancouver mountains. In Gastown, near the cruise docks, the huge **Steamworks Brewpub,** 375 Water St. (✆ **604/689-2739;** www.steamworks.com), has different themed rooms for different tastes, from pub to wine bar to oyster bar.

10

The Caribbean, The Bahamas & the Panama Canal

The Caribbean is the classic cruise destination, tailored to people who want nice white-sand beaches, tiki bars serving tropical drinks, some hot island music, and sun, sun, sun—plus throngs of other cruise passengers enjoying it all with you. Culture and history also have their place in this region. In general, western Caribbean itineraries provide opportunities for visiting the ruins of Maya cities and temple sites on the mainland, while eastern Caribbean itineraries are more likely to offer reminders (albeit faint ones) of British, French, Spanish, and Dutch colonial history. Panama Canal itineraries mix the lore of that massive construction effort with rich Central American culture. And, of course, there's all that gorgeous Caribbean scenery, from the lush jungles of Dominica to the arid moonscape of Aruba.

The Caribbean islands each provide slightly different versions of sun and fun, so depending on your likes and dislikes, you'll appreciate some more than others. Some—especially St. Thomas and Nassau—are much more touristy and commercial than others, but they'll appeal to shoppers with their large variety of bustling stores. Others—Virgin Gorda, St. John, and Jost Van Dyke, for instance—are quieter and more natural and will appeal to those who'd rather walk along a calm beach or take a drive down a lonely, winding road amid lush tropical foliage. Ports such as St. Barts and Virgin Gorda offer a low-key yachting-port atmosphere, while Key West and Cozumel are all about whooping it up. In general, all the Caribbean islands are getting more business by bigger and bigger ships, and more of them. It's harder than ever to find the unspoiled, uncrowded corners of the Caribbean, though they still exist if you know where to look.

HOME PORTS FOR THIS REGION Though the majority of Caribbean cruises still leave from the traditional Florida ports of **Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Port Canaveral,** and to a lesser extent **Tampa,** you can also sail from Galveston, Texas; New Orleans, Louisiana; Charleston, South Carolina; Norfolk, Virginia; Jacksonville, Florida; and even New York, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. Some Caribbean islands commonly serve as home ports, especially Puerto Rico's capital, **San Juan,** but also St. Thomas, Barbados, and others. The upside to these is that you'll start your cruise in the midst of the islands, and probably be able to visit more ports over the course of your trip. The downside is that except for San Juan, it can be more complicated and expensive to fly to these ports than to one of the mainland embarkation points.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY Both vary by island, though English is spoken widely in all the port towns and the U.S. dollar is commonly accepted everywhere. All prices in this chapter are quoted in U.S. dollars, though we've included

information on local currency in the individual reviews.

CALLING FROM THE U.S. & CANADA Most of the islands in this chapter are part of the North American Numbering Plan, meaning you call them just as you would another state or territory on the mainland, adding a "1" before the area code and local number. Where that is not the case (as with Mexico, Belize, the French islands, and so forth), we've included dialing information in the port review.

SHOPPING TIPS You'll find it all here, from cheesy tourist souvenirs to jewelry (lots and lots of jewelry), perfume (ditto), and electronics, with some quality indigenous arts available, too, if you look hard enough. Prices vary by port. Some—such as the U.S. Virgin Islands, St. Barts, St. Martin, and Aruba—are pretty pricey, while Cozumel and the ports of Jamaica are cheaper. **Duty-free merchandise** can save you as little as 5% to as much as 50%, so if there are particular goods you're thinking of buying, it pays to check prices at your local discount retailer before you leave home so you'll know whether you're really getting a bargain. Many ports have particularly good deals on **liquor,** though keep in mind you'll pay tax when coming back into the U.S. if you buy more than your legal limit (see section 5, "Tipping, Customs & Other End-of-Cruise Concerns," in chapter 3 for more information).

When shopping, be aware that some items sold may not be allowed by U.S. Customs. You might be eyeing that gorgeous piece of **black-coral jewelry,** for instance, but laws prohibiting the trade in endangered species make it illegal to bring many products made from coral and other marine animals back to the United States. (Remember, corals aren't rocks, they're living animals—a single branch of coral contains thousands of tiny marine invertebrates called polyps.) **Sea turtles,** too, are highly endangered, and sea horses and conch (yes, the ones you eat in restaurants), while not yet globally protected by law, are currently threatened with extinction. The shopkeeper selling items made from these creatures probably won't tell you they're questionable from a Customs standpoint, but the Customs agent sure will, and may fine you or, at the very least, confiscate the item if he catches you with it. Better to buy a cheap underwater camera and take pictures of these beauties on a snorkeling expedition—you get the memories, the evidence, a little exercise, and good karma to boot.

Cuban cigars are also prohibited by U.S. Customs. You'll see them all over the islands, but be aware that, *legally* speaking, you have to smoke 'em before you head for home.

1 The Cruise Lines' Private Islands

Ideally, a Caribbean cruise should be like acting out a Jimmy Buffett song—lots of eating, drinking, and hanging out on deserted beaches. If only it were that easy. As ships get bigger and cruise line fleets grow, some Caribbean ports feel like being at home in your SUV: all primped up and no place to go. Our recent experiences in St. Thomas, San Juan, Cozumel, and Nassau were more about traffic jams and crowded shopping malls than frosty margaritas on windswept beaches. With easily 15,000-plus passengers pouring off as many as 8 to 10 ships on an average day, it's goodbye to a relaxing beach paradise, and hello to queues, crowds, gridlock, and pushy solicitors.

The antithesis to all of this Caribbean madness, of course, is the cruise line private island, where only one ship at a time (or two, tops) stops for the day. It seems as if

these islands were invented solely to preserve the sanity of the cruise passenger. The mission is simple: provide passengers with a sane, surefire, hassle-free means to enjoy a classic day of sun and fun. All the mainstream lines (except Carnival) have private islands (or parts of islands) that are included as a port of call on many of their Caribbean and Bahamas itineraries. While few have any true Caribbean culture, they do allow cruisers a guaranteed beach day with all the trimmings and a more private experience than enjoyed at most ports' public beaches. Note that aside from Disney's Castaway Cay, none of the islands has a large dock, so passengers are ferried ashore by tender.

CELEBRITY CRUISES See "Royal Caribbean & Celebrity Cruises," below.

COSTA CRUISES Passengers on Costa's eastern Caribbean itineraries spend 1 day at **Catalina Island,** off the coast of the Dominican Republic. This relaxing patch of paradise has a long beach fringed by palm trees, with activities such as volleyball, beach Olympics, and snorkeling. The area adjacent to the tender dock is the busiest spot, as is to be expected, but if you walk down the beach a bit, you'll get a quieter, more private experience (though the coastline gets a little rocky when you get farther away from the dock). Costa provides cruisers with floating beach mats free of charge (most lines charge for them), so you can find your quiet nirvana by paddling out to sea. A local island vendor rents jet skis and offers banana-boat rides, the ship's spa staff sets up a cabana to do massages on the beach, and locals roam around offering them, too. (For a fraction of the cost on ship, a local woman gave Heidi a great foot and shoulder massage.) Locals also sell coconuts for a couple of bucks apiece, first hacking off the end and plunking in a straw or two so you can drink the milk. After you're finished, take the coconut back and they'll whack the thing to pieces with a machete and scrape out the tender coconut meat for you to eat. Music and barbecues round out the day, and there's also a strip of shops hawking jewelry, beachwear, and other souvenirs. ***Note:*** On some itineraries, passengers must pay to hang out here for the day.

DISNEY CRUISE LINE A port of call on all *Disney Magic* and *Disney Wonder* cruises, 1,000-acre, 3×2-mile **Castaway Cay** is rimmed with idyllically clear Bahamian waters and fine sandy beaches. Disney has developed less than 10% of the island, but in that 10% guests can swim and snorkel, rent bikes and boats, get their hair braided, shop, send postcards, have a massage, or just lounge in a hammock or on the beach. Barbecue burgers, ribs, fish, and chicken are available at Cookie's Bar-B-Q, and several bars are scattered around near the beaches. Recent enhancements include the barnacle-encrusted, 175-foot *Flying Dutchman* ghost ship anchored just offshore. An actual prop from Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest,* which was filmed in Freeport, makes a whimsical backdrop for photos.

The island's best quality is its accessibility. Unlike other private islands that require ships to anchor offshore and shuttle passengers back and forth on tenders, Castaway Cay's dock allows guests of *Magic* and *Wonder* to just step right off the ship and walk or take a shuttle tram to the island's attractions. Families can head to their own beach, lined with lounge chairs and pastel-colored umbrellas, where they can swim, explore a 12-acre snorkeling course, climb around on the offshore water-play structures, or rent a kayak, paddle boat, banana boat, sailboat, or other beach equipment. Teens have a beach of their own, where they can play volleyball, soccer, or tetherball; go on a "Wild Side" bike, snorkel, and kayak adventure; or design, build, and race their own boats. Parents who want some quiet time can drop preteens at Scuttle's Cove, a supervised children's center for ages 3 to 12, with activities including arts and crafts, music

The Gulf of Mexico & the Caribbean

Bermuda
ATLANTIC OCEAN
BAHAMAS
Freeport/
Lucaya
Nassau
Andros Is.
Grand Turk
Great
Inagua
CUBA
Camagüey
DOMINICAN
REPUBLIC
HAITI
Port-au-Prince
Santo
Domingo
IS.
GREATER ANTILLES
Montego
Bay
Ochos Ríos
JAMAICA
San Juan
Puerto
Rico
VIRGIN
ISLANDS
St. Martin/
Sint Maarten
Barbuda
Antigua
St. Kitts
& Nevis
Montserrat
Guadeloupe
Dominica
Martinique
St. Lucia
Barbados
St. Vincent
Grenada
Tobago
Trinidad
LESSER ANTILLES
See Eastern Caribbean map
on inside back cover
Caribbean Sea
Aruba
Curaçao
Bonaire
Caracas
Maracaibo
Barranquilla
Orinoco
Caroni
Apure
VENEZUELA
PANAMA
Colon
Panama
City
San Cristóbal
Cauca
Magdalena
Gulf of
Panama
Medellín
COLOMBIA
Uraricuera
BRAZIL

and theater, and scavenger hunts. An excavation site here allows kids to go on their own archaeological dig and make plaster molds of what they find—including a 35-foot reproduction of a whale skeleton.

Meanwhile, Mom and Dad can walk, bike, or hop the shuttle to quiet, secluded Serenity Bay, a mile-long stretch of beach in the northwest part of the island, at the end of an old airstrip decorated with vintage prop planes for a 1940s feel. You can enjoy 25- and 50-minute massages here in private cabanas open to a sea view on one side (sign up for your appointment at the onboard spa on the first day of your cruise to ensure a spot), and the Castaway Air Bar serves up drinks. Heidi sampled a piña colada and a deep-tissue massage at Serenity Bay while her kids were back in the nursery aboard the *Wonder,* and she gives it a giant thumbs-up.

Adult- and child-size bicycles can be rented for $6 per hour. A newly lengthened bike/walking path lets you stretch those hamstrings, but don't go looking for scenery or wildlife—at best, you'll see the occasional bird or leaping lizard. Parasailing can be enjoyed for $79 (45 min., airborne 5–7 min.; over age 8 only). All-terrain strollers with canopies and beach wheelchairs are available free of charge.

HOLLAND AMERICA LINE Located on the 2,500-acre Bahamian island of Little San Salvador, 55-acre **Half Moon Cay** is a port of call on most of HAL's Caribbean and Panama Canal cruises. The sand here is ultrasoft, so go ahead and lie right down in it or flop on one of the many beach chairs or under a blue canvas sun shade (though you'll have to rent it; they're in limited supply).

Families will appreciate the water park at one end of the beach (closest to the tender pier), where there are three water slides on the sand for young children, as well as a couple for teens. Just offshore in the shallow turquoise sea, a cluster of floating toy animals—including a crocodile, shark, and octopus—are tethered to the sea floor and perfect for climbing. Other highlights of the beach area include massage huts as well as air-conditioned, beachfront cabanas available for rent (the regular ones accommodate four people and start at $249 a day, while a superdeluxe cabana for up to 25 people has a private bar, hot tub, water slide and a steeper price tag). A couple hundred bucks will buy you butler service and an open bar. Away from the main beach area and accessible via a short tram ride, shore-excursion opportunities include horseback riding (1½ hr., including a scenic trail ride and a gallop through the surf) and a visit to a 150×75-foot water pen where you can pet and feed tame stingrays. You can also sign up for windsurfing, snorkeling, kayaking, scuba diving, deep-sea fishing, parasailing, sailboarding, or aqua-cycling. Half Moon Cay has lunch facilities, several bars, a playground, and even nature trails through a wild bird preserve at a remote part of the island.

MSC CRUISES Most of MSC's Caribbean cruises spend a day in **Cayo Levantado,** a beach-rimmed, palm-tree-lined rainforest island off the northeast coast of the Dominican Republic's Samana Peninsula. As at all the other private islands, passengers can choose to flop on the beautiful white-sand beach, take a tour (including jeep safaris and a whale-watching cruise to see the humpbacks that winter here), or go snorkeling or swimming. There are beach chairs, umbrellas, and walking paths, plus tables for an open-air lunch; but you won't find a playground, hammocks, or massage facilities. One other difference: A day at this beach is considered a shore excursion, thus passengers are charged a flat rate if they want to play here.

Unlike the other private islands in this section, Cayo Levantado actually isn't private at all: It's run by a Dominican company with whom MSC has scheduled port

calls. The line also makes calls at the Dominican Republic port of La Romana, where passengers can enjoy the 7,000-acre resort **Casa de Campo.**

NORWEGIAN CRUISE LINE NCL's private island, **Great Stirrup Cay,** is a stretch of palm-studded beachfront in the southern Bahamas, and was the very first private resort developed by a cruise line in the Caribbean. It's also the most cramped of the cruise line private islands, and part of the shoreline is very rocky. Still, after a piña colada—or two—you probably won't notice its flaws. Rest assured, the bar, lunch, and watersports facilities are hopping, as the sleepy beach turns into an instant party whenever one of the NCL vessels is in port. Music is either broadcast or performed live, barbecues are fired up, hammocks are strung between palms, and there's a definite beach buzz that takes over. Passengers can ride paddle boats, sail Sunfish, go snorkeling or parasailing, hop on a banana boat, join a game of volleyball on the three deep-sand courts, get a massage at one of the beachside stations (though they're not very private or quiet), or do nothing more than sunbathe all day long. For kids, organized activities include volleyball tournaments and sand-castle building, though there is no playground here.

PRINCESS CRUISES Most of Princess's eastern and western Caribbean itineraries stop at **Princess Cays,** a 40-acre beachfront strip off the southwestern coast of Eleuthera in The Bahamas, which is basically cut off from the rest of the island. The half-mile of shoreline allows passengers to swim, snorkel, and make use of Princess's fleet of Hobie Cats, Sunfish, banana boats, kayaks, and pedal boats. (If you want to rent watersports equipment, be sure to book while aboard ship or even online, before your cruise, to ensure that you get what you want.) There's also a beach barbecue—though don't look for live music or massage facilities, as there aren't any. Those who want to get away from it all can head for the several dozen tree-shaded hammocks at the far end of the beach. For kids, there's a supervised play area with a sandbox and a pirate-ship-themed playground. The Princess shop sells T-shirts and other clothing, plus souvenirs of the mug-and-key-chain variety, and local vendors set up stands around the island to hawk conch shells, shell anklets, straw bags, and other crafts, as well as to do hair braiding.

ROYAL CARIBBEAN & CELEBRITY CRUISES Many ships of sister lines Royal Caribbean and Celebrity stop for a day at one or another of the line's two private beach resorts, CocoCay and Labadee. Both have organized children's activities such as beach parties, volleyball, seashell collecting, and sand-castle building.

At **CocoCay** (aka Little Stirrup Cay), an otherwise uninhabited 140-acre landfall in The Bahamas' Berry Islands, you'll find lots of beaches, hammocks, food, drink, and watersports, plus such activities as limbo contests, water-balloon tosses, relay races, and volleyball tournaments. Kids, both big and small, will like the aqua park with a floating trampoline, water slides, and a sunken airplane and schooner for snorkelers. The newest gimmick: Kids 3 to 8 can now hop in battery-operated mini race cars for what the line bills as a "special driving adventure" on the Fisher-Price Power Wheels Track. For something quieter, head for Wanderer's Beach; it's a longer walk from the tender pier than the other beaches, so it's usually less crowded and quieter. With calm surf and ultrasoft sand, it's perfect for families with young children.

Labadee, an isolated, sun-flooded, 270-acre peninsula along Haiti's north coast, is so completely tourist-oriented that you'd never know it was attached to the rest of poverty-stricken Haiti. Labadee is a rarity among the cruise lines' private islands in that it gives you a real glimpse of island culture. At the straightforwardly named "Folkloric Show," a large, colorfully costumed troupe performs Haiti's distinctly African brand

of dancing, drumming, and song; bands at the various bars and restaurants play the kind of acoustic guitar, banjo, and percussion "mento" music that was a precursor to reggae and other Caribbean styles. Five beaches spread around the peninsula are progressively less crowded the farther you walk from the dock, where enormous tenders make the short ride to and from the ship. For children, there's the pirate-themed Splash Bash area with water sprinklers, fountains, and spilling buckets. There are also floating trampolines, inflatable iceberg-shaped slides, and water seesaws. Kayaking and parasailing are enjoyed from a dock nearby. The latest rage is a 2,800-foot-long zipline called Dragons Breath that takes you over the water of Dragons Tail Beach. At the center of the peninsula, the Haitian Market and Artisans' Market are the port's low points, full of cheesy Africanesque statues and carvings, with touts trying to lure you in with "Sir, let me just show you something over here." Steer clear unless you're desperate for a souvenir. When we were here last, a painter near the dock had much more interesting work for sale.

2 Antigua

Though it's the largest of the British Leeward Islands, Antigua (pronounced An-*tee*-gah) is still only 23km (14 miles) long and 18km (11 miles) wide, and affords a much more laid-back experience than some of the glitzier Caribbean islands. Nice, relaxing beaches are close to port, and **St. John's,** the island's capital and main town, is sleepy and undemanding, full of cobblestone sidewalks and weather-beaten wooden houses. Close to port, you can shop lazily in historic, restored warehouses, while away from St. John's, the rolling, rustic island boasts important historic sites. **Nelson's Dockyard,** for example, was once Britain's main naval station in the Lesser Antilles, and is now a well-maintained national park.

COMING ASHORE Most cruise ships dock at **Heritage Quay** (pronounced *Key*) or the **Nevis Pier in St. John's,** the island's only town of any size on Antigua's western coast, or, if both are occupied, the commercial pier at **Deepwater Harbour,** about 1 mile from town. The three piers have a total capacity of six ships. From the piers, you can either walk or take a short taxi ride into town. A handful of smaller vessels drop anchor at **Falmouth Harbour,** on the English Harbour main road in Falmouth, on the south side of the island. This anchorage is also used for overflow if the St. John's piers are all occupied. A handful of smaller vessels drop anchor at **English Harbour,** on the south coast.

GETTING AROUND Most of the major attractions here are beyond walking distance. **Taxis** meet every cruise ship. Although meters are nonexistent, rates are fixed by the government and posted at the taxi stand at the end of Heritage Quay's pedestrian mall. Drivers often double as tour guides for about $20 per hour for up to four people, with a 2-hour minimum. Tip between 10% and 15% for all rides. **Water taxis** are also available, usually prearranged by the cruise lines or tour operators. Privately operated **buses** are cheaper (little more than $1 to almost anywhere on the island), but service is erratic. Avis, Budget, Hertz, and National all offer **rental cars** on the island, but driving is on the left, signage is inadequate, and you have to buy a $20 temporary driving permit.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY The language is **English,** often spoken with a musical West Indian lilt. The **Eastern Caribbean dollar** (EC$2.71 = US$1; EC$1 = US37¢) is Antigua's official currency, but the U.S. dollar is readily accepted.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Nelson's Dockyard National Park Tour ($56, 3 hr.): The tour begins with a drive through the capital of St. John's and stops at Antigua's national park before heading to Nelson's Dockyard for a guided tour of the admiral's house, sailmaker's loft, officers' quarters, and an 18th-century inn. A short drive brings you to the Blockhouse Ruins, Indian Creek, and the St. James Club and Shirley Heights—the latter sitting atop a rugged cliff with spectacular views.

Helicopter to Montserrat Volcano ($265, 2 hr.): In December 1997, the Soufrière Hills Volcano on the neighboring island of Montserrat blew its top, spewing lava and ash over a huge area and burying large swaths of the island, including the former capital, Plymouth. This trip takes you over both the volcano and the charbroiled highlights of Montserrat's exclusion zone, the area declared off limits to ground transportation.

Off-Road 4×4 Jeep Safari Adventure ($60, 3 hr.): Tour the island's only remaining rainforest via a four-wheel-drive vehicle, and stop at the ruins of forts, sugar mills, and plantation houses. The excursion includes beach time.

Hiking Safari Adventure ($49, 3 hr.): This 4-mile uphill/downhill hike takes you through Antigua's rainforest, allowing a panoramic view from one of the island's highest peaks (360m/1,181 ft.).

Bird Island Catamaran Sail ($84, 5 hr.): Sail along the reef-protected north coast of Antigua into the sheltered bay of Bird Island, a designated national park that is perfect for beginning snorkelers. If you want some exercise, venture up the trail for a fantastic view of the Atlantic from 100-foot cliffs.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

In addition to shopping (see below), St. John's has a few attractions that can be easily reached on foot. The **Museum of Antigua and Barbuda,** at the intersection of Market and Long streets (✆ **268/462-1469;** www.antiguamuseums.org/MuseumAntBar.htm), traces the history of the nation from its geological birth to the present day. Housed in a neoclassic former courthouse built in 1750, its exhibits include pre-Columbian tools and artifacts, a replica of an Arawak wattle-and-daub hut, African-Caribbean pottery, and sections dedicated to the island's naval, sugar, and slavery eras. It's open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 3 or 4pm, Saturday from 10am to 2pm. Tickets are $3. A couple of blocks uphill from the museum, bordered by Church, Long, and Newgate streets, **St. John's Anglican Cathedral** dominates St. John's skyline with its 21m (69-ft.) aluminum-capped twin spires. The original building, a simple wooden structure built in 1681, was replaced in 1720 by a brick building, which was destroyed during an 1843 earthquake. Upon completion in 1847, the present baroque structure was not universally appreciated: Ecclesiastical architects criticized it as being like "a pagan temple with two dumpy pepper-pot towers." The cavernous interior is entirely encased in pitch pine, a construction method intended to secure the building from hurricanes and earthquakes.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

One of the major historical attractions of the eastern Caribbean, **Nelson's Dockyard National Park** (✆ **268/481-5021;** www.antiguamuseums.org/nelsonsdockyard.htm) lies 18km (11 miles) southeast of St. John's, alongside one of the world's best-protected natural harbors. English ships used the site as a refuge from hurricanes as early

as 1671, and the dockyard played a major role during the 18th century, an era of privateers, pirates, and great sea battles. Admiral Nelson's headquarters from 1784 to 1787, the restored dockyard today remains the only Georgian naval base still in use. At its heart, the **Dockyard Museum** (www.antiguamuseums.org/dockyardmuseum.htm), housed in a former naval officers' house built in 1855, traces the history of the site from its beginnings as a British Navy stronghold to its development as a national park and yachting center. Nautical memorabilia make up much of the display. Uphill and east of the dockyard, the **Dow's Hill Interpretation Center** (✆ **268/481-5045**) features an entertaining 15-minute multimedia overview of Antiguan history and an observation platform that affords a 360-degree view of the park. Farther uphill, Palladian arches mark the **Blockhouse,** a military fortification built in 1787 with officers' quarters and a powder magazine. For an eagle's-eye view of English Harbour, continue to the hill's summit, to the **Shirley Heights Lookout.** Fortified to defend the precious cargo in the harbor below, Fort Shirley's barracks, arched walkways, batteries, and powder magazines are scattered around the hilltop. The lookout, with its view of the French island of Guadeloupe, was the main signal station used to warn of approaching hostile ships.

The grounds of the national park, which represent 10% of Antigua's total land area, are well worth exploring. Bordered on one side by sandy beaches, the park is blanketed in cactus, tamarind, cinnamon, and turpentine trees, as well as mangroves that shelter African cattle egrets. An array of **nature trails,** which take anywhere from 30 minutes to 5 hours to walk, meanders through the vegetation and provides vistas of the coast. One trail climbs to **Fort Berkeley,** built in 1704 to protect the harbor's entrance. Admission, which is $5 for adults and free for children 11 and under, covers the dockyard, the Dockyard Museum, Dow's Hill Interpretation Center, the Blockhouse, Shirley Heights, and the rest of the park. The complex is open daily from 9am to 5pm. It's within walking distance of cruise ships that dock at English Harbour. Free guided tours of the dockyard last 15 to 20 minutes; tipping is discretionary.

If you've worked up an appetite, the dockyard's rustic **Admiral's Inn** (✆ **268/460-1027**) serves lunches that usually include pumpkin soup and main courses such as local red snapper, grilled steak, and lobster. Built in 1788, the restored brick building originally stored barrels of pitch, turpentine, and lead used to repair ships. Lunch prices start at $12.

To see what's billed as the only operational 18th-century sugar mill in the Caribbean, visit **Betty's Hope,** not far from Pares village on the island's east side (✆ **268/462-1469**). On-site are twin mills, the remnants of a boiling house, and a small visitor center, which opens its doors Monday through Saturday from 10am to 2pm. Gardeners should be able to spot goldenseal bushes, neem trees, and wild tamarinds on the rolling hills. Serene cows saunter lazily on the grounds.

Not far from Betty's Hope, on the extreme eastern tip of the island, **Devil's Bridge** is one of Antigua's most picturesque natural wonders. Over the centuries, powerful Atlantic breakers, gathering strength over the course of their 4,830km (3,000-mile) run from Africa, have carved out a natural arch in the limestone coastline and created blowholes through which the surf spurts skyward at high tide.

Another option for nature lovers is **Wallings Conservation Area,** Antigua's largest remaining tract of tropical rainforest. Located in the southwest, this lush wilderness area provides three hiking trails and numerous opportunities to spot wildlife (including many Caribbean birds) and rich vegetation. If you've spent your day at Nelson's Dockyard National Park, pass through the area on the way back to your ship via the

circular Fig Tree Drive. Although plagued with potholes, this is the island's most scenic drive. It winds through the tropical forest, passing fishing villages, frisky goats, and old sugar mills along the way.

BEACHES

Antiguans claim that the island is home to 365 beaches, one for each day of the year. True or not, all of them are public, and quite a few are spectacular. Closest to St. John's, **Fort James Beach,** only 5 minutes and a $7 cab fare from the cruise dock, is popular with both locals and tourists. There are volleyball and cricket daily, plus umbrellas and beach chairs available for rent. For a change of pace, hike up the hill to explore the authentically derelict ruins of Fort James, which once protected St. John's harbor. A bit farther north, a $10 cab ride from the dock, the half-mile beach at **Dickenson Bay** is bustling with numerous hotels, restaurants, and watersports vendors. The water is calm, and chairs and umbrellas are available for rent. If you crave complete peace and quiet, head to Antigua's most beautiful beach, at **Half Moon Bay,** isolated at the island's southeast extreme. Waves at the beach's center are great for bodysurfing, while the quieter eastern side is better for children and snorkeling. A restaurant and bar are near the parking lot.

Antigua's **dive sites** include reefs, wall drops, caves, and shipwrecks. To arrange a dive, contact **Dive Antigua,** at the north end of Dickenson Bay (✆ **268/462-3483**). A two-tank dive costs $90. Reef snorkeling is $40.

SHOPPING

To your right as you leave the docks, **Redcliffe Quay** is Antigua's most interesting shopping complex. Most of the sugar, coffee, and tobacco produced on the island in years past was stored in the warehouses here, and slave auctions were common before the island abolished slavery in 1834. Today, the restored buildings house an array of boutiques and restaurants. For more local color, turn right (south) once you've reached Market Street and walk 5 blocks to the **Public Market,** which is a good place to sample locally produced fruits and vegetables or to pick up some Antiguan pottery or baskets. Other shopping districts include **Heritage Quay,** right at the dock (home to some 40 duty-free shops), and **St. Mary's Street.**

3 Aruba

Situated only 32km (20 miles) north of Venezuela, arid Aruba has unwaveringly sunny skies, warm temperatures, and cooling breezes, along with some of the best beaches in the Caribbean, scuba diving, snorkeling, windsurfing, and all the other watersports you'd expect. Away from the beach, Aruba is full of cactus, iguanas, donkeys, and strange boulder formations. Contrasting sharply with the southern shoreline's beaches, the north coast has craggy limestone cliffs, sand dunes, and crashing breakers. Focused on shopping? The concentration of stores and malls in **Oranjestad,** the island's capital, is as impressive as any in the Caribbean. In between purchases, try your luck at one of the island's dozen casinos; two are just steps away from your ship. Aruba is still part of the Netherlands, so there's a Dutch influence, which adds a nice European flavor. Though it has a few small museums, and some centuries-old indigenous rock glyphs and paintings, nobody comes to Aruba for culture or history.

COMING ASHORE Cruise ships arrive at the **Port of Oranjestad.** The three modern terminals have tourist information booths, phones, ATMs, and a handful of

shops. The terminals can accommodate three megaships and two smaller ships; one of the three terminals is a container berth a short walk from the main terminal. From the pier, it's a 5-minute walk to the shopping districts of downtown Oranjestad and a 10-minute drive to the beaches.

GETTING AROUND You'll need transportation to get to most of the beaches. **Taxis** line up at the dock to take you wherever you want to go. Fares are fixed, and every driver has a copy of the official rate schedule (it's generally $10–$14 to the beach resorts). Excellent roads connect major tourist attractions, and all the major **car-rental** companies accept valid U.S. or Canadian driver's licenses. Avis, Budget, Dollar, Hertz, and National all have offices here. Good daily **bus service** offers $2 round-trips between the beach hotels and Oranjestad. The bus terminal is across the street from the cruise terminal on L. G. Smith Boulevard. Be sure to have exact change ready.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY The official languages are **Dutch** and **Papiamentu,** but nearly everybody speaks **English.** Spanish is also widely spoken. The **Aruba guilder** (AG), also known as the florin, is the official currency (1.79 AG = US$1; 1 AG = US55¢), but U.S. dollars are as widely accepted.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

In addition to the tours described here, cruise lines typically offer about a dozen snorkeling, diving, sailing, and other water-oriented tours.

Island Bike Adventure ($58, 3½ hr.): Explore Aruba's wild northeast coast by mountain bike, pedaling 16km (10 miles) and visiting the Baby Natural Bridge (cut by the sea and wind), the Bushiribana Gold Mine, the Alto Vista Chapel, and the California Lighthouse.

Arikok National Park Hike & Beach ($49, 3½ hr.): Travel about 30 minutes by bus to Aruba's east end, where a park ranger will lead you on a hike through the desertlike environment, full of divi-divi trees, iguanas, cacti, and (if you can spot 'em) wild donkeys. Posthike, you can cool off with a swim or go snorkeling at Baby Beach.

Off-Road Land Rover Adventure ($115, 7½ hr.): Take off into Aruba's backcountry in an SUV, with you behind the wheel and in radio contact with your guide. You'll visit attractions such as the Baby Natural Bridge, an ostrich farm, and the Bushiribana Gold Mine.

Atlantis Submarine Adventure ($99, 1½ hr.): Cruise 45m (148 ft.) below the sea in a submarine. During the gentle descent, you'll pass by scuba divers, coral reefs, shipwrecks, and hundreds of curious sergeant majors, damselfish, parrotfish, and angelfish.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Aruba's capital has a sunny Caribbean demeanor, with Dutch colonial buildings painted in vivid colors. The main thoroughfare, **L. G. Smith Boulevard,** runs along the waterfront and is crowded with marinas, shopping malls, restaurants, and bars. The harbor is packed with fishing boats and schooners docked next to stalls, where vendors hawk fruits, vegetables, and fish. Two casinos—the elegant, 24-hour **Crystal Casino,** at the Aruba Renaissance Beach Resort, L. G. Smith Blvd. 82 (✆ **297/58-36000**), and the less assuming **Seaport Casino,** L. G. Smith Blvd. 9 (✆ **297/58-36000**)—are just steps from the dock.

For a dash of culture, head to one of the town's small museums, which are open on weekdays only. Squeezed between St. Franciscus Roman Catholic Church and the

parish rectory is the small **Archaeological Museum of Aruba,** J. E. Irausquinplein 2A (✆ **297/58-28979**), whose exhibits highlight the island's Amerindian heritage, with pottery vessels, shell and stone tools, burial urns, and skulls and bones on display. The museum was recently closed for renovation but at press time was scheduled to reopen soon. Admission is free.

To defend the island against pirates, the Dutch erected **Fort Zoutman** in 1796, and added a tower in 1867. Since 1992, the complex has housed the modest **Museo Historico Arubano,** Zoutmanstraat 4 (✆ **297/582-6099**), which displays island history from the colonial period till now, prehistoric Amerindian artifacts, and relics from the Dutch colonial period. Admission is $8. The small **Numismatic Museum of Aruba,** Westraat z/n (✆ **297/965-6969**), has meticulous, homemade exhibits telling the history of the world through coins. Dedicated numismatists can spend the better part of

the morning perusing the 35,000 different specimens from more than 400 countries. Admission is free, though donations are appreciated; open only weekdays till 1pm and Saturday mornings.

ON YOUR OWN: TOURING BY RENTAL JEEP

The best way to see Aruba's desertlike terrain is to rent a four-wheel-drive vehicle. Be careful of the increasingly popular ATVs that share the road and often at high speeds. Car-rental companies have maps highlighting the best routes to reach the attractions. Here's one popular option:

Following the system of roads that traces the perimeter of the island, start clockwise from Oranjestad. Drive past the hotel strip, toward the island's northwesternmost point. Here, the **California Lighthouse** affords sweeping 360-degree views of spectacular scenery—gentle sand dunes, rocky coral shoreline, and turbulent waves. The picturesque lighthouse gets its name from the *California,* a passenger ship that sank off the nearby coast in 1916. From here on, your adventure will take you into the island's moonlike terrain, past heaps of giant boulders and barren rocky coastline. The well-maintained road that links the hotel strip with Oranjestad deteriorates abruptly into a band of rubble, and the calm, turquoise sea turns rough and rowdy.

By the time you reach the **Alto Vista Chapel,** about 8km (5 miles) from the lighthouse, you'll probably be coated with red dust; it should contrast nicely with the quaint pale-yellow church, built by native Indians and Spanish settlers in 1750, before the island had its own priest. It was the island's first chapel.

Farther along the northern coast, you'll approach the hulking ruins of the **Bushiribana Gold Smelter.** Built in 1872, its massive stone walls are remnants of Aruba's 19th-century gold-mining heritage. Climb the multitiered interior for impressive sea views. Too bad the walls have been marred with artless graffiti. Too bad, too, that the nearby Natural Bridge, a limestone arch above the sea, once the most photographed attraction in Aruba, collapsed in 2005. You can still see the **Baby Natural Bridge,** though, in the same area, its span carved out by centuries of pounding surf.

Next, head toward the center of the island and the bizarre **Ayó and Casibari rock formations.** Looking like something out of *The Flintstones,* the gargantuan Ayó rocks served Aruba's early inhabitants as a dwelling or religious site. The reddish-brown petroglyphs on the boulders suggest mystical significance.

Farther east, back along the northern coast, **Arikok National Park,** Aruba's showcase ecological preserve, sprawls over roughly 20% of the island. Its premier attraction is a series of caves that punctuate the cliff sides of the area's mesas. The most popular, **Fontein Cave,** has brownish-red drawings left by Amerindians and graffiti etched by early European settlers. Nearby **Quadirikiri Cave** boasts two large chambers with roof openings that allow sunlight in, making flashlights unnecessary. Hundreds of small bats use the 30m-long (98-ft.) tunnel to reach their nests deeper in the cave. You'll need a flashlight (rentable at the entrance) to explore the 90m (295-ft.) passageway of **Baranca Sunu,** another cave in the area commonly known as the Tunnel of Love because of its heart-shaped entrance.

Heading southeast toward Aruba's behemoth oil refinery, you'll eventually come to **Baby Beach,** at the island's easternmost point. Like a great big bathtub, this shallow bowl of warm turquoise water is protected by an almost complete circle of rock—it's a great place for a dip after a sweaty day behind the wheel. Just try to ignore the giant oil refinery visible in the distance.

BEACHES

All of Aruba's beaches are public, but chairs and shade huts are hotel property. If you use them, expect to be charged. Shade huts located at beaches with no hotels are free of charge. **Palm Beach,** home of Aruba's glamorous high-rise hotels, is great for swimming, sunbathing, sailing, people-watching, fishing, and snorkeling. It has two piers and numerous watersports operators, and can get crowded. Separated from Palm Beach by a limestone outcrop, **Eagle Beach** stretches as far as the eye can see. The sugar-white sand and gentle surf are ideal for swimming, and though the nearby hotels offer watersports and beach activities, the ambience is relaxed and quiet. A couple of bars punctuate the expansive strand, and shaded picnic areas are provided for the public. Well-protected **Baby Beach** (see above) is a prime destination for families with young children.

The island's best **snorkeling sites** are around Malmok Beach (also a great **windsurfing** spot) and Boca Catalina, where the water is calm and shallow and marine life is plentiful. **Dive sites** stretch along the entire southern coast, but most divers head for the German freighter *Antilla,* which was scuttled during World War II off the island's northwestern tip, near Palm Beach. The island's largest watersports operators, **Pelican Adventures** (✆ **297/586-3271;** www.pelican-aruba.com) and **Red Sail Sports** (✆ **297/586-1603** or 877-RED-SAIL [733-7245] in the U.S.; www.aruba-redsail.com), offer sailing, windsurfing, and water-skiing in addition to one- and two-tank dives ($60 and $120, respectively) and snorkeling trips ($48 for 2½ hr., $75 for 4½ hr., champagne brunch sometimes included).

SHOPPING

Because the island is part of the Netherlands, Dutch goods such as Delft porcelain, chocolate, and cheese are especially good buys. Items from Indonesia, another former Dutch colony, are reasonably priced, too. Skin- and hair-care products made from locally produced aloe are also popular and practical. If you're looking for big-ticket items, shops have the usual array of watches, cameras, gold and diamond jewelry, Cuban cigars, premium liquor, porcelain, French and American fragrances, and designer shoes, bags, and clothing; the 3.3% duty and lack of sales tax make for some decent prices.

Caya G. F. Betico Croes (aka Main St.) is the city's major shopping venue, running roughly parallel to the waterfront several blocks inland. **Renaissance Mall,** right downtown, is the number-one high-end shopping area, while **Renaissance Marketplace,** across the street, is a distant second. Combined, they have more than 100 stores, 10 restaurants and cafes, two casinos, and a movie theater. Just down the road, **Royal Plaza Mall** is chock-full of popular restaurants and less upscale boutiques. Two new malls across from the high-rise hotel area have sprung up and are gaining popularity. **Paeo Herencia** is a two-level mall with boutiques and restaurants around a fountained central plaza. **The Village** was mostly vacant at press time but because it's in the bustling resort zone, it will no doubt fill with plenty of places to spend your cash.

4 The Bahamas: Nassau & Freeport

Nassau and **Freeport** are among the busiest cruise ports on the Caribbean circuit, even though technically The Bahamas aren't in the Caribbean at all—they're in the Atlantic, north of the Caribbean and less than 161km (100 miles) from Miami. Though holdovers from Great Britain's long colonial occupation linger in some

architecture and culture, the vibe here isn't all that much different from parts of Florida, and the ports are totally tourist-oriented, with more shopping than the Mall of America, all surrounded by beaches and casinos.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **English** is the official language of The Bahamas. Its legal tender is the **Bahamian dollar** (B$), whose value is always the same as that of the U.S. dollar. Both currencies are accepted everywhere on the islands.

NASSAU

Nassau is the cultural, social, political, and economic center of The Bahamas. With its beaches, shopping, resorts, casinos, historic landmarks, and water and land activities, it's also the island chain's most visited destination—one million travelers a year make their way to the town, and Nassau is one of the world's busiest cruise ship ports. The Nassau/Paradise Island area comprises two separate islands. Nassau is on the northeastern shore of 34km (21-mile) New Providence Island, while tiny Paradise Island is linked to New Providence by bridges, and protects the Nassau harbor for a 5km (3-mile) stretch. It was here that the white-sand beaches of the Atlantis Hotel and Ocean Club served as locations for James Bond in *Casino Royale.*

COMING ASHORE The cruise ship docks at **Prince George Wharf** are in the center of town at Rawson Square, in the middle of Nassau's shopping frenzy. The main docks can accommodate six larger cruise ships and one smaller one on an innermost dock. There are plans in place to widen the entrance channel to better accommodate megaships like the *Queen Mary 2.*

GETTING AROUND Walk. The major attractions and stores are pretty concentrated, and if you're really fit you can even trek over to Cable Beach or Paradise Island. Otherwise, you'll have no problem finding taxis—they'll find you. There's no good reason to rent a car here.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

In addition to the excursions below, cruise lines typically offer a variety of snorkeling, diving, and boat tours. Avoid the city bus tours, which are dull, dull, dull.

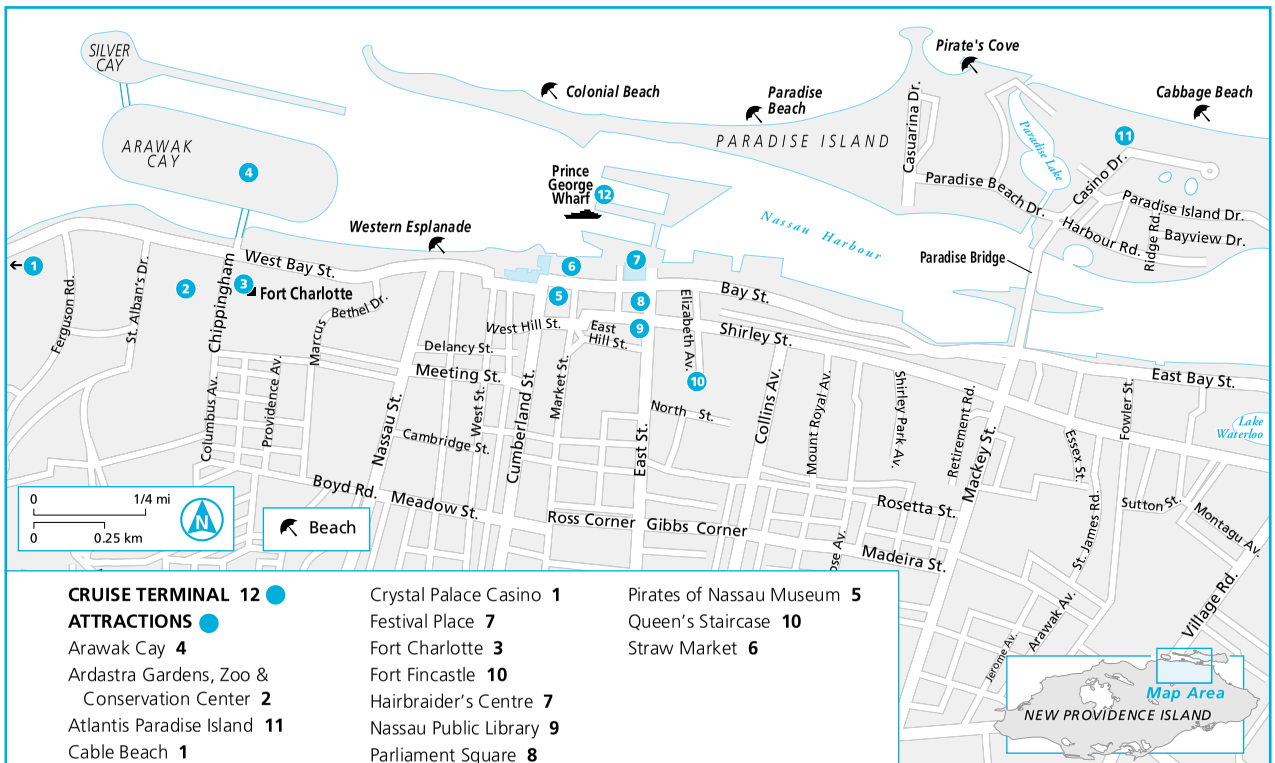
Harbor Cruise & Atlantis Resort ($62, 2½ hr.): A tour boat with a local guide shows you the sights (such as they are) from the water. It then drops you at the fanciful Atlantis Resort for a brief tour that includes a visit to Predator Lagoon, home to sharks, barracuda, and other toothy fish.

Thriller Powerboat Tour ($55, 1 hr.): This is a thrill-seeker's excursion in high-speed boats that roar around the waters off Nassau, scaring the hell out of the fish. Not our personal favorite way to see . . . well, anything, but it sure is fast. Vroom!

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

As you exit from the cruise ship wharf into the main port area, you'll have no choice but to pass through **Festival Place,** a barnlike hall full of little shops and stalls selling arts and crafts, T-shirts, hot sauces, and other touristy items. Outside, hawkers will encourage you to have your hair braided at the **Hairbraider's Centre.** This government-sponsored open-air pavilion attracts braiding experts from all over the island.

Shopping is *the* thing here, but there are a few other sights of interest. Just across Bay Street from Rawson Square (inland from the wharf) are the flamingo-pink government buildings of **Parliament Square,** constructed in 1815. The House of Assembly, old colonial Secretary's Office, and Supreme Court flank a statue of Queen



CRUISE TERMINAL 12

ATTRACTIONS

- Arawak Cay **4**
- Ardastra Gardens, Zoo & Conservation Center **2**
- Atlantis Paradise Island **11**
- Cable Beach **1**
- Crystal Palace Casino **1**
- Festival Place **7**
- Fort Charlotte **3**
- Fort Fincastle **10**
- Hairbraider's Centre **7**
- Nassau Public Library **9**
- Parliament Square **8**
- Pirates of Nassau Museum **5**
- Queen's Staircase **10**
- Straw Market **6**

Victoria, while a bust on the north side of the square honors Sir Milo B. Butler, the first governor-general of The Bahamas. One block inland, the pink, octagonal **Nassau Public Library** was built as a prison in 1798, and today its collections of books, historical prints, colonial documents, and Arawak Indian artifacts are kept in what were once cells. It's one of the city's oldest buildings.

Slaves carved the **Queen's Staircase** out of a solid limestone cliff in 1793, originally designed as an escape route for soldiers; each step now represents a year in Queen Victoria's 65-year reign. Lush plants and a waterfall stand guard over the staircase, which is a few blocks up from the library on East Street and leads to **Fort Fincastle,** on Elizabeth Avenue, built in 1793 by Lord Dunmore, the royal governor. An elevator climbs a 38m-high (125-ft.) water tower, where you can look down on the arrowhead-shaped fort. Walk around on your own or hire a guide.

At the corny **Pirates of Nassau Museum,** at King and George streets (✆ **242/356-3759;** www.pirates-of-nassau.com), Captain Teach and his fearsome crew guide you through the age of piracy in the lawless Nassau of 1716. Admission is a steep $12 for adults and $6 for kids between 4 and 17. Hours are Monday through Saturday from 9am to 6pm, Sunday from 9am to noon.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

About a mile west of downtown Nassau, just off West Bay Street, **Fort Charlotte** is the largest fort in The Bahamas, covering more than 41 hilltop hectares (100 acres) and with impressive views of Paradise Island, Nassau, and the harbor. The complex, constructed in 1788, features a moat, dungeons, underground passageways, and 42 cannons. Nearby, parading pink flamingos are the main attraction at the lush, 2-hectare (5-acre) **Ardastra Gardens, Zoo & Conservation Center,** on Chippingham Road (✆ **242/323-5806;** www.ardastra.com). The graceful birds obey the drillmaster's orders daily at 10:30am, 2:10, and 4:10pm. Other exotic wildlife—parrots, boa constrictors, honey bears, macaws, and capuchin monkeys—are less talented but still fascinating in their own right. Meandering paths show off the garden's exotic fruit trees, coconut palms, ackee and mango trees, bougainvillea, and hibiscus blossoms. Admission is $15 for adults, $7.50 for children 4 to 12.

If you're in the mood for some conch, head for **Arawak Cay,** a small man-made island across West Bay Street from Ardastra Gardens and Fort Charlotte. Join the locals in sampling conch with hot sauce, and wash it down with a cocktail made from coconut water and gin. Farther to the west, the 3,252-sq.-m (35,000-sq.-ft.) **Crystal Palace Casino,** West Bay Street, Cable Beach (✆ **800/222-7466** or 242/327-6200), is the only casino on New Providence Island. Slots are open all night long, but tables close at 4am.

On Paradise Island, the towering, fancifully designed megaresort known as **Atlantis Paradise Island** (✆ **242/363-3000;** www.atlantis.com) is the largest gaming and entertainment complex in the Caribbean, its casino boasting nearly 1,000 slot machines and 78 gaming tables, all tied together with a "Lost City of Atlantis" theme. Though only paying hotel guests can use Atlantis's beaches, water slides, and pools, cruise passengers in for the day can visit the casino, eat at the restaurants, and sign up for the "Discover Atlantis" tour. The guided excursion, which includes round-trip ferry transport between the ship and property, includes a walk through the resort's sprawling 11-million-gallon lagoon system that boasts more than 200 sea species and 50,000 individual creatures. You'll also tour **"The Dig,"** a fantastic world of faux Atlantis ruins flooded by the sea. The interconnected passageways, boulevards, and

chambers, now inhabited by piranhas, hammerhead sharks, stingrays, and morays, are visible through huge glass windows. It is purported to be the largest man-made marine habitat in the world. To see this part of the resort, you must sign up for the guided "Discovery Tour." Tickets, available at the resort's guest services desks, cost $35 adults, $25 kids 4 to 12. Another tour, sometimes available to a handful of cruise lines, gives access to the resort's beaches and restaurants.

BEACHES

On New Providence Island, sun worshippers make the 8km (5-mile) pilgrimage to 6.5km (4-mile) **Cable Beach,** which has various watersports and easy access to shops, a casino, bars, and restaurants. Not on the same level but more convenient for cruise ship passengers, the **Western Esplanade** sweeps westward from the Hilton British Colonial hotel, with changing facilities, restrooms, and a snack bar.

Paradise Beach, on Paradise Island, is a ferry ride away from Prince George Wharf. The price of admission ($3 for adults, $1 for children) includes use of a shower and locker. An extra $10 deposit is required for towels. Paradise Island has a number of smaller beaches as well, including **Pirate's Cove Beach** and **Cabbage Beach,** the latter of which often fills up with guests of the nearby resorts.

SHOPPING

In 1992, The Bahamas abolished import duties on 11 luxury-goods categories, including china, crystal, fine linens, jewelry, leather goods, photographic equipment, watches, and fragrances. Even so, you can end up spending more on an item here than at home. True bargains are rare.

The principal shopping area is **Bay Street** and the adjacent blocks, almost the first things you see when leaving your ship. Here, you'll find dozens of duty-free luxury-goods stores, plus hundreds of others selling T-shirts, tourist gimcracks, duty-free booze and cigars, and recordings of Junkanoo music. The crowded aisles of the **Straw Market,** a few blocks west of the docks, display all manner of straw hats, handbags, dolls, place mats, and other items, but be aware that most aren't of the best quality, nor even made locally—much of it is imported from Asia. Welcome to the global market.

FREEPORT/LUCAYA

Freeport/Lucaya, on Grand Bahama Island, is the second-most-popular destination in The Bahamas. Technically, Freeport is the landlocked section of town, while adjacent Lucaya hugs the waterfront. Originally two separate developments, they've grown together over the years, and though they have none of Nassau's colonial charm, they do have plenty of sun, surf, golf, tennis, and watersports. Gambling and shopping were big business here for a while, but three hurricanes in 2 years have quelled the frenzy, leaving the port with a calmer, quieter feel.

COMING ASHORE Ships dock at **Lucayan Harbor,** a dreary port in the middle of nowhere, with a small straw market, shopping area, and hair braiders camped out in the middle of an industrial zone. The docks can accommodate three larger ships, or several smaller ones. You're better served by taking a $24 taxi ride to the **Port Lucaya Marketplace,** where you'll find most of the action. Closer to the pier, but not as bustling, is the **International Bazaar,** which will cost you $16 in cab fare.

GETTING AROUND Once you get to Freeport by **taxi,** you can explore the center of town on foot. Taxis can also take you to far-flung attractions. The government

sets taxi rates, which start at $4 and increase 40¢ for each additional .5km (¼ mile), plus $3 extra per passenger.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Dolphin Encounter ($118, 3½ hr.): Pat a dolphin on the nose! On this excursion, you can watch, touch, and photograph Flipper, or at least one of his relatives. It's organized by UNEXSO Dolphin Encounter (at Sanctuary Bay).

Kayak Nature Tour ($89, 6 hr.): Visit a protected island creek, kayak through a mangrove forest, explore the island's caves, and take a guided nature walk into Lucayan National Park. The excursion includes lunch and beach time.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

Nothing of note is within walking distance of the port. You must take a cab over to Freeport/Lucaya for all attractions.

A couple of miles east of downtown Freeport on East Settlers Way, the 40-hectare (100-acre) **Rand Nature Centre** (✆ **242/352-5438**) serves as the regional headquarters of The Bahamas National Trust. Pineland nature trails meander past native flora and wild birds, including the Bahama parrot. Other highlights include native animal displays (don't miss the boa constrictors), an education center, and a gift shop. Admission is $5; open Monday through Friday from 9am to 4pm.

If you'd like a taste of The Bahamas the way they used to be, head for the **Star Club,** on Bayshore Road, on the island's west end (✆ **242/346-6207**). Built in the 1940s, the Star was Grand Bahama's first hotel, and over the years it's hosted many famous guests. You can order Bahamian chicken in the bag, burgers, fish and chips, "fresh sexy" ceviche conch salad, or cooked conch prepared as chowder and fritters. But don't come for the food; come for the good times and to mix with the locals. Lunch costs $8. Next door, **Austin's Calypso Bar** is a colorful old dive if ever there was one.

BEACHES

Grand Bahama Island has miles of white-sand beaches. **Xanadu Beach,** immediately east of Freeport at the Xanadu Beach Resort, is the closest to the cruise pier, but two of the island's best are **Taíno Beach** and **Lucayan Beach,** both on the Lucaya oceanfront. Of the two, Lucayan Beach is easier to reach and closer to the Port Lucaya Marketplace, and has beach-chair rentals, watersports, and restaurants. A 20-minute ride east of Lucaya, **Gold Rock Beach** may be the island's best if total isolation is your thing. Hidden away in Lucayan National Park, it has barbecue pits, picnic tables, and a spectacular low tide. **Barbary Beach,** slightly closer to Lucaya, is great for seashell hunters, and white spider lilies in the area bloom spectacularly in May and June.

SHOPPING

The **International Bazaar,** at East Mall Drive and East Sunrise Highway, is pure 1960s Bahamian kitsch, and though relentlessly cheerful, it's rather long in the tooth. Each area of the 4-hectare (10-acre), 100-shop complex attempts to capture the ambience of a different region of the globe. Buses marked INTERNATIONAL BAZAAR deliver passengers to the center's much-photographed Torii Gate, a Japanese symbol of welcome.

The **Port Lucaya Marketplace,** on Seahorse Road, across the street from the Lucayan Beach, is a large shopping-and-dining complex that in recent years has eclipsed the International Bazaar. This is definitely where the shopping/dining action is now. Many of the restaurants and shops overlook a 50-slip marina next to

Bahamas Golf Excursions

Our Lucaya Beach & Golf Resort, Royal Palm Way, F-42500, Lucaya (✆ **242/373-2003;** www.ourlucaya.com), has two 18-hole, par-72 courses. The Lucayan course, designed by Dick Wilson, features well-protected elevated greens, fairways lined with tropical foliage, and doglegs. The links-style Reef course, designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr., has water hazards on 13 of 18 holes. Greens fees are $155 for 18 holes, including cart. Club rentals are $45.

UNEXSO (✆ **242/373-1244;** www.unexso.com), a resource for swimming, snorkeling, and diving gear. A two-tank dive will cost you $99 per person; dolphin encounters start from $75 per adult and $50 for kids. Call ahead for reservations.

Next door to the marketplace, the **Straw Market** sells items with a Bahamian touch—baskets, hats, handbags, and place mats. Quality varies, so look around before buying.

5 Barbados

No port of call in the southern Caribbean can compete with Barbados when it comes to natural beauty, attractions, and especially its seemingly endless stretches of pink and white sandy beaches—among the best in the entire Caribbean Basin. Originally operated on a plantation economy that made its British colonial aristocracy rich, the island is the most easterly in the Caribbean, floating in the mid-Atlantic like a great coral reef. Topography varies from rolling hills and savage waves on the eastern (Atlantic) coast to densely populated flatlands, rows of hotels and apartments, and sheltered beaches in the southwest. The people in Barbados are called Bajans, and you'll see this term used everywhere.

COMING ASHORE About a mile from the capital **Bridgetown,** the island's modern cruise ship terminal offers car rentals, taxi services, sightseeing tours, and a tourist information office, plus shops, bars, restaurants, an Internet cafe, a post office, and scads of vendors. The main terminal has docking capacity for five cruise ships. A sixth can tie up at a nearby commercial pier, a 5-minute shuttle ride from the terminal.

GETTING AROUND You'll probably need transportation to get to the beaches, though you can walk into Bridgetown in about 15 minutes via a scenic park that runs along the shoreline between the port and city center. You'll find **taxis** just outside the cruise terminal. They're not metered, but their rates are fixed by the government (settle on the price before getting in). Recently opened, a **shuttle service** also takes visitors to key attractions.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **English** is spoken with an island lilt. The **Barbados dollar** (Bds$) is the official currency (Bds$1.99 = US$1; Bds$1 = US50¢), but U.S. dollars are commonly accepted.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

It's not easy to get around Barbados quickly and conveniently, so a shore excursion is a good idea here.

Kayak & Turtle Encounter ($84, 4 hr.): A boat ride along the west coast brings you to the beach, where you'll clamber into a kayak for a 45-minute paddle along the shore. Once at the snorkel site, you'll be able to swim with and feed sea turtles.

Mount Gay Rum Distillery & Banks Beer Tour ($42, 3½ hr.): Talk about getting in the spirit. This excursion takes you for a tour and tipple at Barbados's number-one rum distillery; then it heads over to the Banks Brewery for the yeasty side of things.

Rainforest Hike & Cave Adventure ($79, 4 hr.): A guide leads your group through one of Barbados's rainforest gullies, then down into a natural cave.

Harrison's Cave & Tropical Rainforest Hike ($79, 4 hr.): Most cruise lines offer a tour to Harrison's Cave in the center of the island (see "On Your Own: Beyond the Port Area," below, for details), coupled with a 45-minute guided hike through the rainforest.

Horseback Riding & Country Drive ($100, 3½ hr.): Horse treks through the heart of the island wind past old plantation houses, sugar cane fields, old sugar factories, small villages, and, if you're lucky, green monkeys scouting for food.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

For the purposes of argument, let's consider Bridgetown "beyond walking distance," but for those who like a bit of a stroll, it's a pleasant walk into town where you can take in the waterfront parks and classic Caribbean architecture. For the truly hearty hiker, a first-class beach can be found about a half kilometer down the road once you cross over the charming bridge in town. Look for the entrance at an outdoor eatery called Taboo.

Most visitors spend their time exploring the island's beauty. All cruise ship excursions visit **Harrison's Cave,** Welchman Hall, St. Thomas (✆ **246/438-6640;** www.harrisonscave.com), Barbados's top tourist attraction. Here you can see a beautiful underground world from aboard an electric tram and trailer. Admission is $40 for adults and $20 for children. If you'd like to go on your own, the taxi ride takes about 30 minutes and costs at least $40 round-trip. About 1.6km (1 mile) away is the **Flower Forest,** Richmond Plantation, St. Joseph (✆ **246/433-8152**), a former sugar plantation that's now a junglelike botanical garden, with paths winding among huge tropical flowers and plants. Admission is $8.

Welchman Hall Gully (www.welchmanhallgullybarbados.com), St. Thomas (Hwy. 2 from Bridgetown), is a lush tropical garden owned by the Barbados National Trust. It's 13km (8 miles) from the port (reachable by bus) and features some plants that were here when English settlers landed in 1627, plus later imports like cocoa bushes, exotic orchids, and breadfruit trees that are supposedly descendants of the seedlings brought ashore by Captain Bligh, of *Bounty* fame. Many of the plants are labeled; occasionally you'll spot a wild monkey. Admission is $8.

The **Sunbury Plantation House,** 25 minutes from Bridgetown along Hwy. 5 (✆ **246/423-6270;** www.barbadosgreathouse.com), is the only plantation great house on Barbados whose rooms are all open for viewing. The 300-year-old house is steeped in history, with mahogany antiques, old prints, and a collection of horse-drawn carriages. Admission is $9.50. Signs along the highway will guide you in, right before Six Cross Roads.

BEACHES

Beaches on the island's western "Gold Coast" are far preferable (and closer) than those on the surf-pounded Atlantic side, which are dangerous for swimming. All Barbados beaches are open to the public, even those in front of the big resort hotels and private homes. You'll need a good pair of walking shoes or a taxi to get to them, but the baby-powder sand between your toes makes the trip well worth it.

ON THE GOLD COAST **Payne's Bay,** with access from the Coach House (✆ **246/432-1163**) or Mannie's Suga Suga restaurant (✆ **246/419-4511**), is a good beach for watersports, especially snorkeling. There's also a parking area here. This beach can get rather crowded, but the beautiful bay makes it worth it. Directly south of Payne's Bay, at Fresh Water Bay, is a trio of fine beaches: **Brighton Beach, Brandon's Beach,** and **Paradise Beach.** Farther north, **Church Point** can get crowded, but it's one of the most scenic bays in Barbados, and the swimming is ideal. Retreat under some shade trees when you've had enough sun. You can also order drinks at the Colony Club Resort's beach terrace.

Snorkelers in particular seek out the glassy blue waters by **Mullins Beach.** There are some shady areas, and you can park on the main road. Just north of here is another good stretch, **Heywoods Beach.**

ON THE SOUTH COAST Just outside Bridgetown, **Carlisle Bay Beach** is popular with locals and is a great snorkeling spot. Farther south, near Rockley, **Accra Beach** is the biggest on the south coast, and very popular with both locals and visitors. **Sandy Beach,** reached from the parking lot on the Worthing main road, has tranquil waters opening onto a lagoon. This is a family favorite, with lots of screaming and yelling, especially on weekends. Food and drink are sold here. Windsurfers are particularly fond of the trade winds that sweep across wide **Casuarina Beach,** even on the hottest summer days. Access is from Maxwell Coast Road, across the property of the Casuarina Beach Hotel. **Silver Sands Beach** is to the east of the town of Oistins, near the very southernmost point of Barbados, directly east of South Point Lighthouse. This white sandy beach is a favorite with many Bajans, who probably want to keep it a secret from as many visitors as possible. (Tough luck, Bajans!) Windsurfing is good here, and you can rent boards at **Club Mistral,** at the Silver Sands Resort (✆ **246/428-6001**). Open daily from 8am to 5pm.

ON THE SOUTHEAST COAST The southeast coast is known for its big waves, especially at **Crane Beach,** a white sandy stretch backed by cliffs and palms, which often appears in travel-magazine articles about Barbados. The waters here allow excellent bodysurfing—but this is real ocean swimming, not the calm Caribbean, so be careful. This one will cost you about $20 in taxi fare from the cruise pier, each way.

SHOPPING

The shopping-mall-size cruise terminal contains retail stores, duty-free shops, and a plethora of vendors selling arts and crafts, jewelry, liquor, china, crystal, electronics, perfume, leather goods, and great local hot sauce, as well as yummy Punch de Crème (you can get a free sample before buying), a creamy rum drink. Among Barbados handicrafts, you'll find lots of black-coral jewelry, but beware—because black coral is endangered, it's illegal to bring it back to the United States. We suggest looking, but not buying. Local clay potters turn out some really interesting products, some based on centuries-old designs.

6 Belize

Situated on the northeastern tip of Central America, bordering Mexico on the north, Guatemala to the west and south, and the Caribbean to the east, Belize combines Central American and Caribbean cultures. It's home to ancient Maya ruins and a 298km (185-mile) coral reef that runs the entire length of the country—the largest in the Western Hemisphere and the second largest in the world—and supports a tremendous

number of patch reefs, shoals, and more than 1,000 islands called cayes (pronounced *keys*), the largest and most populous being **Ambergris Caye.** (Both Ambergris Caye and Caye Caulker are popular with visitors, but require a flight from Belize City. However, smaller lines such as Windstar may just skip Belize City completely and anchor offshore from the cayes and other parts of the mainland, such as southern Dangriga and Placencia.) Unlike many other Caribbean countries, Belize is serious in its dedication to conservation: One-fifth of its total landmass is dedicated as nature reserves, and 7,770 sq. km (2,973 sq. miles) of its waters are protected as well.

Belize City is the economic center of the country. Choosing which natural or man-made wonder to explore will be the most stressful thing you do in this very laid-back, diverse, stable, and English-speaking nation. Its population ranges from Creoles, Garifuna (Black Carib Indians), and mestizos (a mix of Spanish and Indian) to Spanish, Maya, English, Lebanese, and Chinese peoples to Eastern Indians. The country has the highest concentration of Maya sites among all Central American nations.

COMING ASHORE Shallow waters mean ships must anchor offshore and tender passengers in—a 15- to 20-minute trip. You arrive at a multimillion-dollar pier called the **Fort Street Tourism Village,** which has four main terminals with shops, restaurants, and tourist information. The port can accommodate four cruise ships on a given day; each is assigned to a separate terminal.

GETTING AROUND **Taxis** are available at the pier, in town, and in resort areas, and are easily recognized by their green license plates. Although the taxis have no meters, the drivers do charge somewhat standard rates, but it's always important to settle your fare before hiring a taxi. Aside from the local shopping, most other attractions are about an hour away.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **English** is the official language of Belize, although Spanish, Creole, Garifuna, and Mayan are spoken throughout the country as well. The **Belize dollar** (BZ) has a fixed exchange rate of BZ$1.95 = US$1 (BZ$1 = US51¢). Most establishments, as well as taxis and vendors on the street, take U.S. dollars. In especially touristy areas, just be sure to ask if the price quoted is in U.S. or BZ dollars. Unless otherwise specified, prices in this section are given in U.S. dollars.

CALLING FROM THE U.S. To make a call from the U.S. to Belize, dial the international access code **(011),** the country code **(501),** and then the number of the establishment.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Lamanai ($96, 7 hr.): Lamanai is one of the largest ceremonial centers in Belize. In the original Mayan language, its name means "submerged crocodile," and various crocodile carvings are seen throughout the site. After a 45-minute drive up the Northern Highway to Tower Hill, you'll board a riverboat and head up the New River. Along the way, through the mangroves, your guide will point out crocodiles basking in the sun, a variety of birds (including jaçanas and hawks), delicate waterlilies, and other exotic flowers such as black orchids. You'll pass local fisherman and, surprisingly, Mennonite farms—Mennonites from Canada and Mexico began arriving in Belize in 1958 in search of land and a more isolated and simple life, and today their community numbers around 7,000. Landing at the Lamanai grounds, you'll have lunch and then tour the series of temples. There are more than 700 structures, most of them still buried beneath mounds of earth. For a view above the thick jungle, you can climb

some of the temples—look in the trees for toucans and spider monkeys playing or napping. You won't mistake the roar of the howler monkey. Your guide may tell you about the red gumbo-limbo tree, whose bark becomes a shade of red and then peels off—it's jokingly referred to as the tourist tree. A small archaeological museum is on-site, as well as a few souvenir stands.

Xunantunich ($89, 7 hr.): This site, also called Maiden of the Rock, is near the Guatemalan border overlooking the Mopan River; it was a major ceremonial center during the classic Maya period. After crossing the river by hand-cranked ferry, you can explore six major plazas surrounded by more than 25 temples and palaces, including El Castillo (the castle), largest of the temples. Be sure to climb to the top—it's well worth it for the amazing panoramic view. There's also a visitor center with old excavation photos, a scale model, and a few exhibits and souvenir shops. Afterward, you'll head to San Ignacio to eat lunch and enjoy a marimba band.

Hol Chan Marine Reserve & Shark Ray Alley ($99, 7½ hr.): You'll head north for an hour-long speedboat ride to Hol Chan (Mayan for "little channel"), 6.4km (4 miles) southeast of San Pedro on Ambergris Caye; snorkel the reef for about an hour; and then head off to the Shark Ray Alley dive site, about 5 minutes away, where you'll see and pet dozens of southern stingrays and nurse sharks.

Cave Tubing & Jungle Trek ($99, 6¼ hr.): On arriving at Jaguar Paw, you take a 45-minute hike down a jungle trail where your guide will point out various plants and trees used by the ancient Maya for medicinal purposes. When you get to the cave, your guide will hand out flashlights and inner tubes and set you afloat, propelled by the current, through the cave system. On several occasions, you'll emerge into the sunlight before entering another cave. The float lasts about 2 hours, after which you'll have lunch. Bring a change of clothes. Minimum age: 12.

Two-Tank Scuba Dive at Turneffe Atoll ($169, 6 hr.): After a 50-minute boat ride, you arrive at Turneffe Atoll for dives at two different sites (with depths of 50–70 ft.) among reef fish and growths of sponge and coral.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Belize City is the hub of the country, but doesn't boast the country's major attractions. The historic **harbor district** right around the pier is small and quaint. You'll find a few restaurants here, and the **Baron Bliss Park and Lighthouse** is just a short stroll away. After sailing from Portugal, the eponymous baron arrived sick with food poisoning and remained aboard his yacht for 2 months while local fisherman and administrators treated him kindly and taught him about Belize. He died soon after, but not before changing his will and leaving $2 million to Belize in a trust fund. That money made possible the building of the Bliss Institute Library and Museum and a number of health clinics and markets around the country, as well as helping with the Belize City water system. The baron is considered Belize's greatest benefactor, and Baron Bliss Day, a national holiday, is celebrated on March 9.

Outside the immediate port area, much of the rest of the city is run-down and poor, with narrow, crowded streets and many old colonial structures in need of repair. However, because tourism is an important industry in Belize, the country is making an effort to spruce up the city and reduce crime, instituting a squad of tourism police to patrol popular tourist areas. Its officers are dressed in brown uniforms.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

See "Best Cruise Line Shore Excursions," above, for a discussion of the Maya ruins. Animal enthusiasts might want to visit the **Community Baboon Sanctuary,** about 48km (30 miles) west of Belize City off the Northern Highway in the Belize District (✆ **501/220-2181;** www.howlermonkeys.org), which offers a guided tour through forest trails. Through a grass-roots effort, the villagers and landowners are committed to preserving the habitat necessary to ensure a healthy population of black howler monkeys (known locally as baboons). Those more interested in birding can tour the **Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary,** about 8km (5 miles) farther up the Northern Highway (✆ **501/614-5658**). The sanctuary provides a habitat for more than 360 species of birds. A visit to the **Belize Zoo,** along the Western Highway (✆ **501/220-8004;** www.belizezoo.org), is a worthwhile venture. First created as a haven for injured animals that couldn't be returned to the wild, the zoo now houses an impressive array of large cats, primates, reptiles, and birds in large, airy enclosures. Admission is $8 for adults, $4 for children. Open daily from 8am to 5pm.

Back in Belize City, if you want to do some gambling, the small **Princess Hotel-Casino** is 2km (1¼ miles) from the cruise pier on Newtown Barricks Road (✆ **501/223-2670**); it's about 10 minutes and $5 by taxi from the pier.

BEACHES

Compared to many other parts of the Caribbean, the beaches of Belize are neither the biggest nor the widest, but they are relaxing, with very clear water. Areas with the best beach sunbathing are in the cayes, including Ambergris Caye, Caye Caulker, and Tobacco Caye, and on the mainland to the south in Dangriga and Placencia. There are no beaches near Belize City.

SHOPPING

In general, the best buys in Belize are wooden and slate carvings, Maya calendars, pottery, ceramics, and furniture made by the Mennonites. At the pier, the **Tourism Village** has shops specializing in local souvenirs such as mahogany bowls, jewelry, clothes, assorted carvings, and artwork. A local favorite is **Marie Sharp's hot sauces and jams.** They're served everywhere and can be purchased to take home.

7 British Virgin Islands: Tortola & Virgin Gorda

With small bays and hidden coves that were once havens for pirates (Norman Island is said to have been the prototype for Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*), the British Virgin Islands (BVIs) are among the world's loveliest cruising regions. Among its 60-some islands, only **Tortola, Virgin Gorda,** and **Jost Van Dyke** (plus Anegada, 16 miles to the north) are of significant size. The English officially annexed the islands in 1672, and today they're a British territory, with their own elected government and a population of about 21,000. Tortola attracts the megaships, while Virgin Gorda and Jost Van Dyke attract the small ships of the Seabourn, SeaDream, Windstar, and Star Clippers fleets.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **English** is spoken here, and the **U.S. dollar** is the legal currency (much to the surprise of arriving Brits).

TORTOLA

Situated on the island's south shore, the once-sleepy village and colonial capital of **Road Town** became a bustling center after the 70-acre Wickhams Cay marina brought

in a massive yacht-chartering business. The rest of the southern coast is characterized by rugged mountain peaks. On the northern coast are beautiful bays with white sandy beaches, banana trees, mangoes, and clusters of palms.

If your ship isn't scheduled to visit Virgin Gorda, but you want to, just catch a boat, ferry, or launch here and you'll be on the island in no time, because it's only a 12-mile trip.

COMING ASHORE Many ships dock right in **Road Town Harbour** or anchor offshore and tender in passengers. Two megaships can tie up at the **Cruise Pier,** while smaller ships or tenders may dock at nearby **Road Town Jetty** or the **West End** ferry terminal. **Soper's Hole** is a popular tender destination as well.

GETTING AROUND You can walk around Road Town. Open-air and sedan-style **taxis** meet every arriving cruise ship and carry passengers to the beaches and other attractions. Fares are set, so ask what you'll be paying before you get in.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Town & Country Excursion ($36, 3½ hr.): Tour the island in an open-air minibus, visiting the Botanic Gardens, Cane Garden Bay, Bomba's Surfside Shack at Cappoon's Bay, and Soper's Hole.

Tortola Snorkeling Adventure ($59, 3 hr.): Cross the Sir Frances Drake Channel by boat to Norman Island, one of the BVI's prime snorkel sites, full of coral formations, colorful fish, and a group of caves at Treasure Point, where pirate treasure is reputedly hidden.

Forest Walk & Beach Tour ($46, 4½ hr.): Safari buses take you to Tortola's interior for a 1-mile hike through the Sage Mountain rainforest to the highest point in the Virgin Islands, then head down the Ridge Road for a brief stop at the Botanic Gardens. Minimum age: 12.

Wreck of the *Rhone* Two-Tank Certified Dive ($155, 4 hr.): A guided dive takes you to a British ship sunk in an 1867 hurricane, her bow lying almost fully intact in 80 feet of water. All divers must be certified and have dived within the past 2 years.

The Baths at Virgin Gorda ($72, 5 hr.): If your ship doesn't stop in Virgin Gorda, you can still go from Tortola, taking a 45-minute cruise across the Drake Channel and then spending a couple of hours swimming around at the Baths, a veritable bouquet of seaside boulders formed by volcanic activity (see description under Virgin Gorda, below).

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Besides the handful of shops on Main and Upper Main streets in Road Town, there's also the **Botanic Gardens** (✆ **284/494-4557**) right in the middle of town, across from the police station. It's open daily from 8am to 4pm and features a wide variety of flowers and plants, including a section on medicinal plants. Admission is $3.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

On Tortola, you have mainly the natural landscape to observe. The big attraction is **Sage Mountain National Park** (www.bvinationalparkstrust.org/toparks.html), its peak rising to 1,716 feet, the highest point in the BVIs and USVIs. The park was established in 1964 to protect those remnants of Tortola's original forests not burned or cleared during its plantation era. You'll find a lush forest of mango, papaya, breadfruit, coconut, birch berry, mountain guava, and guava berry trees, many labeled for identification. This is a great place to enjoy a picnic while overlooking neighboring

islets and cays. Any taxi driver can take you to the mountain. Before going, stop at the Wickhams Cay tourist office, near the pier, and pick up a brochure with a map and an outline of the park's trails. The two main hikes are the Rain Forest Trail and the Mahogany Forest Trail.

BEACHES

Most of the beaches are a 20-minute taxi ride from the cruise dock. Figure on about $15 per person one-way (some will charge less, about $8–$9 per person if you've got a group), but discuss it with the driver before setting out. You can also ask him to pick you up at a designated time.

The finest beach is at **Cane Garden Bay** on the island's northwest coast, across the mountains from Road Town but worth the trip. **Rhymer's** (✆ **284/495-4639**) serves a good if not inexpensive lunch of the conch, whelk, and barbecue-spareribs variety (main courses: $15 and up). Surfers like **Apple Bay,** also on the northwest side, while next-door **Cappoon's Bay** is known more for **Bomba's Surfside Shack** (✆ **284/495-4148**), the oldest, most memorable bar on Tortola, covered with Day-Glo graffiti and laced with wire and rejected odds and ends of plywood, driftwood, and abandoned rubber tires. Lunch is about $10, and beer and Painkillers, that classic Caribbean rum specialty, are dispensed till the cows come home. At the extreme west end of the island, **Smuggler's Cove** is a wide crescent of white sand wrapped around calm, sky-blue water.

SHOPPING

Shopping on Tortola is a minor activity compared to other Caribbean ports. Only British goods are imported without duty, and they are the best buys, especially English china. You'll also find West Indian art, terra-cotta pottery, wicker and rattan home furnishings, Mexican glassware, dhurrie rugs, baskets, and ceramics.

Most stores are on Main Street in Road Town. The **Pusser's Company Store,** Main Street, Road Town (✆ **284/494-2467;** www.pussers.com), offers a selection of classic travel and adventure clothing, along with Pusser's famous rum, which was served aboard British Navy ships for over 300 years.

VIRGIN GORDA

Instead of visiting Tortola, some small cruise ships put in at lovely Virgin Gorda, famous for its boulder-strewn beach known as the **Baths.** The third-largest island in the colony, it got its name ("Fat Virgin") from Christopher Columbus, who thought the mountain framing it looked like a protruding stomach. Megaships that stop at Tortola usually offer a 4½-hour excursion to Virgin Gorda for about $65.

COMING ASHORE Virgin Gorda doesn't have a pier to suit any of the large ships. Most vessels anchor in Gorda Sound and tender passengers to a pier at **Spanish Town,** which can accommodate smaller cruise ships. Ferries from Tortola also berth here.

GETTING AROUND **Taxis** are available at the pier and will take visitors to the Baths and area beaches for about $8 per person each way. For a tour of the island, contact Andy Flax of the **Virgin Gorda Tours Association** (c/o the Fischers Cove Beach Hotel; ✆ **284/495-5252**). It costs about $40 per couple, and you'll be picked up at the dock if you give at least 24-hour notice.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Island Tour & the Baths ($65–$72, 3½ hr.): Most Virgin Gorda tours are variations on this theme: touring the island by open-air bus, stopping at its highest point for a

A Slice of Paradise: Jost Van Dyke

Covering only 10 square km (4 sq. miles), mountainous Jost Van Dyke is an offbeat treat, visited mostly by private yachts and a few small cruise ships, which all anchor offshore. They often throw afternoon beach parties on the sands at White Bay, with the crew lugging ashore a picnic lunch for a leisurely afternoon of eating, drinking, and swimming. If your ship stays late, dont miss a trip to **Foxy's** (✆ **284/495-9258**), a well-known watering hole at the far end of Great Harbour and popular with the yachting set as well as locals. It's your classic island beach bar, with music pounding and drinks flowing into the wee hours.

snapshot, taking in the village of Spanish Town, then stopping at Copper Mine National Park, where Amerindian and later European miners once dug for copper. The ruins you see today are what's left of a British operation from 1860. Tours end at the Baths, where you'll have time for swimming, snorkeling, and exploring among the boulders.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

The **Virgin Gorda Yacht Harbour** at St. Thomas Bay has several restaurants and shops.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

You might consider cabbing up to glamorous **Little Dix Bay Resort** (✆ **284/495-5555;** www.littledixbay.com), established by Laurance Rockefeller in 1965, to enjoy a lunch buffet at an outdoor pavilion that shows off Virgin Gorda's beautiful hills, bays, and sky. Aside from this, most people head for the Baths, which really is a spectacular site (see "Beaches," below).

BEACHES

The major reason cruise ships come to Virgin Gorda is to visit the **Baths,** where geologists believe ice-age eruptions caused house-size boulders to topple onto one another to form the saltwater grottoes we see today. The pools around the Baths are excellent for swimming and snorkeling (equipment can be rented on the beach), and a crawl between and among the boulders, which in places are very cavelike, is more than a little bit fun. A cafe sits just above the beach for a quick snack or a cool drink.

Devil's Bay, a great beach just south of the Baths, is usually less crowded. Just north of the Baths is **Spring Bay,** one of the island's best beaches, with white sand, clear water, and good snorkeling. Nearby is the **Crawl,** a natural pool formed by rocks, great for novice snorkelers; a marked path leads here from Spring Bay. **Trunk Bay,** just to the north, is a wide sand beach that can be reached via a rough path from Spring Bay.

Devil's Bay National Park can be reached by a trail from the Baths. The walk to the secluded coral-sand beach takes about 15 minutes through a natural setting of boulders and dry coastal vegetation.

SHOPPING

The only notable shopping here is right at the Yacht Harbour complex, where you'll find a few dive shops, boutiques, and handicrafts shops.

8 Cozumel & the Yucatán Peninsula

The island of Cozumel, just off Mexico's Yucatán coast, is one of the busiest cruise ports you'll ever see, with up to 16 ships visiting every day during high season, counting those that anchor offshore and ferry in passengers. All that activity can make the port town of **San Miguel** seem more like Times Square than the sleepy, refreshingly gritty town it once was, and the pace of transformation doesn't seem to be slowing down, despite the major thrashing from Hurricane Wilma in 2005. A superfast cleanup and rebuilding effort had such success that ships began returning to the port only a month after the storm hit, and things have been moving apace ever since. By the time you read this, Wilma's damage should be completely erased.

The bustling shops, bars, and restaurants of San Miguel have their draw, but for us the major allure of Cozumel remains its proximity to the ancient Maya ruins such as **Tulum** and **Chichén Itzá,** on the mainland of the Yucatán Peninsula. To see the ruins from here, you must take the 45-minute ferry ride between Cozumel and **Playa del Carmen,** on the mainland, though a few cruise ships call directly at Playa, anchoring offshore. Many ships en route to Cozumel pause in Playa del Carmen to drop off passengers who have signed up for ruins tours. After the tours, passengers take a ferry back to the ship in Cozumel (or, if the tour is by plane, get dropped off at the airport in Cozumel, near downtown). If your ship is not stopping at Playa, bear in mind that the ferry ride back and forth from Cozumel will take almost 2 hours total; if you're more interested in relaxing, you may want to hang out on the island.

In recent years, a handful of other Yucatán ports have come onto the scene, including **Calica,** just south of Playa, where there's little more than a pier; **Progreso,** on the Gulf coast of the Yucatán, making it the closest to Chichén Itzá, as well as the city of Mérida; and **Costa Maya,** about 161km (100 miles) south near the sleepy fishing village of Mahajual.

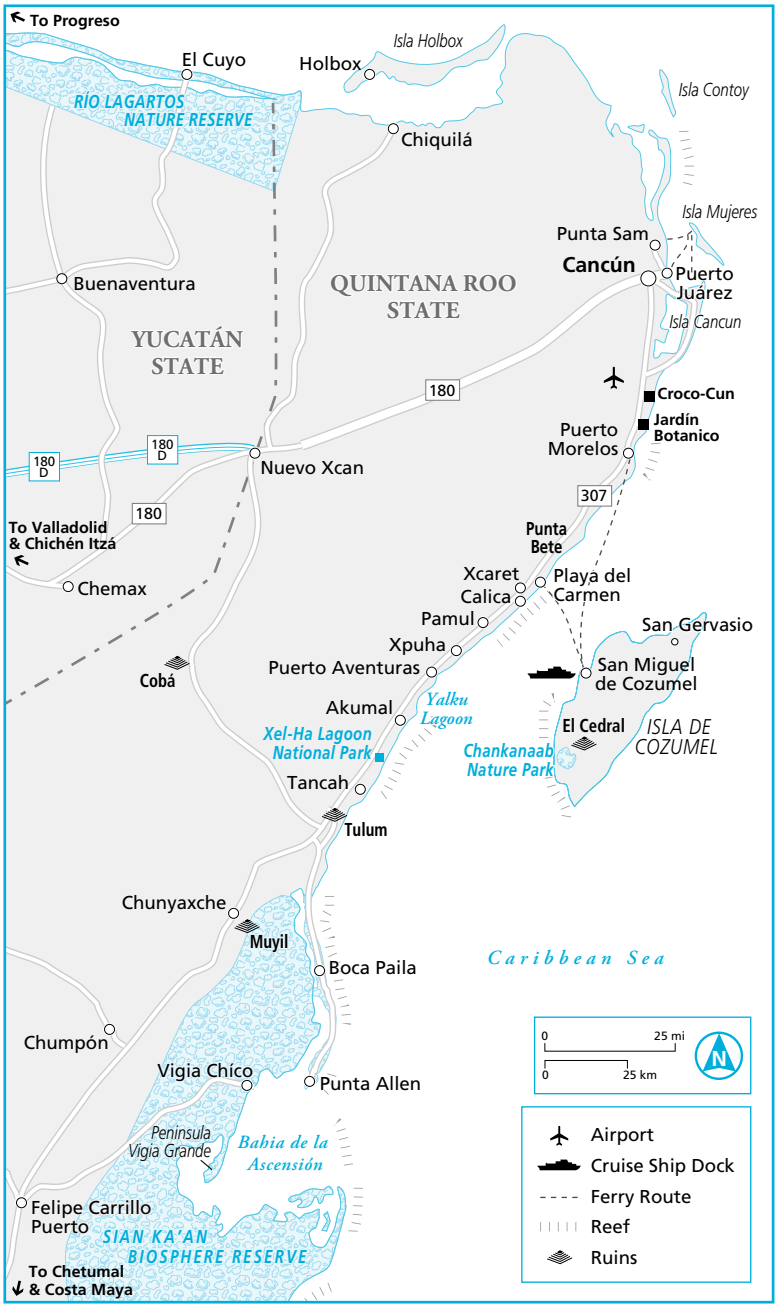
LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **Spanish** is the tongue of the land, although **English** is spoken in most places that cater to tourists. The Mexican currency is the **nuevo peso (new peso).** Its symbol is the "$" sign, but it's hardly the equivalent of the U.S. dollar—the exchange rate is 10.71 pesos = US$1 (1 peso = about US9¢). The main tourist stores gladly accept U.S. dollars.

CALLING FROM THE U.S. You need to dial the international access code **(011)** and the country code **(52)** before the numbers listed below.

MAYA RUINS & OTHER MAINLAND ATTRACTIONS

Because all of the sites listed here are quite far from the cruise piers, most cruise passengers visit them as part of **shore excursions.** Admission to the sites is included in the excursion prices, which typically run from $75 (by bus) to $199 (plus $39 airport tax) by plane for Chichén Itzá, around $87 for a bus to Tulum, and about $79 for a bus to Cobá. Chichén Itzá and Cobá are all-day excursions. Visits to smaller Tulum are often paired with a visit to the Xel-Ha Eco Park, making it a full-day trek ($129). Guests are usually served free and refreshingly cold Mexican beer on the bus ride back after exploring the ruins.

CHICHEN ITZA The largest and most fabled of the Yucatán ruins, Chichén Itzá (meaning "Mouth of the Well of the Itza Family") was founded in A.D. 445 by the Maya and later inhabited by the Toltecs of central Mexico. At its height, the city had about 50,000 residents, but it was mysteriously abandoned only 2 centuries after its


To Progreso
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Chiquilá
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Cancún
Puerto Juárez
Isla Cancun
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To Valladolid & Chichén Itzá
Punta Bete
Chemax
Xcaret
Calica
Playa del Carmen
Pamul
San Gervasio
Xpuha
Cobá
Puerto Aventuras
San Miguel de Cozumel
Akumal
Yalku Lagoon
El Cedral
ISLA DE COZUMEL
Xel-Ha Lagoon National Park
Chankanaab Nature Park
Tancah
Tulum
Chunyaxche
Muyil
Caribbean Sea
Boca Paila
Chumpón
Vigia Chico
Punta Allen
Peninsula Vigia Grande
Bahia de la Ascensión
Felipe Carrillo Puerto
SIAN KA'AN BIOSPHERE RESERVE
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Cruise Ship Dock
Ferry Route
Reef
Ruins

founding. After lying dormant for 2 more centuries, the site was resettled and enjoyed prosperity again until the early 13th century, when it was once more relinquished to the surrounding jungle. The area covers 18 sq. km (7 sq. miles), so you can see only a fraction of it on a day trip. These are some of the highlights.

The best known of Chichén Itzá's ruins is the magnificent **El Castillo pyramid** (also called the Pyramid of Kukulkán), which was built with the Maya calendar in mind. The four stairways leading up to the central platform each have 91 steps, making a total of 364; when you add the top central platform, you get the 365 days of the solar year. On either side of each stairway are nine terraces, for a total of 18 on each face of the pyramid, equaling the number of months in the Maya solar calendar. Decorating these terraces are 52 panels that represent the 52-year cycle when both the solar and religious calendars would become realigned. The pyramid's alignment is such that on the **spring** or **fall equinox,** light striking the pyramid gives the illusion of a snake slithering down the steps to join its gigantic stone head mounted at the base.

Northwest of El Castillo is Chichén's main **Ball Court (Juego de Pelota),** the largest and best preserved of such Maya ruins anywhere. Carved on both walls of the ball court are scenes of Maya figures dressed as ball players and decked out in heavy protective padding. The carved scene also shows a headless player kneeling with blood shooting from his neck; another player holding the head looks on. Here's the way it worked: Players on two teams tried to knock a hard rubber ball through one of the two stone rings placed high on either wall, using only their elbows, knees, and hips. According to legend, the losing players paid for defeat with their lives. Some experts, however, say the victors were the only appropriate sacrifices for the gods. Note the lack of bleacher seating: As the games were played as a ritual, for the entertainment of the gods, only a single judge looked on.

Temples are set at both ends of the ball court. The **North Temple** has sculptured pillars and more sculptures inside, as well as badly ruined murals. The acoustics of the ball court are so good that from the North Temple, a person speaking can be heard clearly at the opposite end, about 136m (450 ft.) away. Near the southeastern corner of the main ball court is the **Temple of the Jaguars,** a small temple with serpent columns and carved panels showing warriors and jaguars. Up the steps and inside the temple, a mural chronicles a battle in a Maya village. To the right of the ball court is the **Temple of the Skulls (Tzompantli),** decorated with rows of skulls carved into the stone platform. When a sacrificial victim's head was cut off, it was impaled on a pole and displayed in a tidy row with the others.

Follow the dirt road (actually an ancient *sacbé,* or causeway, made from a white, compacted, claylike soil that made the way visible at night) that heads north from the Platform of Venus. After about 5 minutes, you'll come to the **Sacred Cenote,** a great natural well that may have given Chichén Itzá its name. This well was used for ceremonial purposes, not for drinking water. According to legend, sacrificial victims adorned with gold and other riches were drowned in this pool to honor the rain god Chaac. In the early 20th century, American consul and Harvard professor Edward Thompson bought the ruins of Chichén Itzá and explored the cenote with dredges and divers, unearthing (and exporting) a fortune in gold and jade.

Due east of El Castillo is one of the most impressive structures at Chichén: the **Temple of the Warriors,** named for the carvings of warriors marching along its walls. It's also called the Group of the Thousand Columns for the rows of broken square

pillars that flank it. A figure of Chaac-Mool sits at the top of the temple, surrounded by impressive columns carved in relief to look like enormous feathered serpents. According to scholars, the high priest would tear out a sacrificial victim's heart here, and then throw the body down the steps, where another priest would strip off its skin. The high priest would then dress himself in the skin, cross to a nearby platform, and dance. Lovely, eh?

South of the temple is another group of columns (these ones round) that were once an important **market,** controlling the trade in salt on the Yucatán. South of the market, a cluster of interesting ruins include the **Observatory (El Caracol),** a complex building with a circular tower through whose slits astronomers could observe the cardinal directions and the approach of the all-important spring and autumn equinoxes; the **Edifice of the Nuns (Edificio de las Monjas),** which was named for its resemblance to a European convent; and the **Church (La Iglesia),** one of the oldest buildings at Chichén and named for its beautiful decorations. Its ceiling, with a Maya false arch, is a stone replica of the thatched ceiling in a typical Maya home of the period.

TULUM About 130km (80 miles) south of Cancún and about a 30-minute drive from Playa del Carmen, the small walled city of Tulum is the single-most-visited Maya ruin due to its proximity to the ports. It was the only Maya city built on the coast and the only one inhabited when the Spanish conquistadors arrived in the 1500s. From its dramatic perch atop seaside cliffs, you can see wonderful panoramic views of the Caribbean. Though nowhere near as large and impressive as Chichén Itzá, Tulum shares a similar prominent feature: a ruin topped with a **temple to Kukulkán,** the primary Maya/Olmec god. Other important structures include the **Temple of the Frescoes,** the **Temple of the Descending God,** the **House of Columns,** and the **House of the Cenote,** which is a well. There's also a sliver of silky beach amid the site, so bring your bathing suit for a quick refreshing dip. New visitor facilities include a well-stocked bookstore and a soon-to-open museum.

COBA A 35-minute drive northwest of Tulum puts you at Cobá, site of one of the most important city-states in the Maya empire. Cobá flourished from A.D. 300 to 1000, with its population numbering perhaps 40,000. Excavation work began in 1972, but archaeologists estimate that only a small percentage of this dead city has yet been uncovered. The site lies on four lakes. Its 81 primitive acres provide excellent opportunities for exploration by hikers. Cobá's pyramid, **Nohoch Mul,** is the tallest in the Yucatán.

XCARET ECOLOGICAL PARK About 6.5km (4 miles) south of Playa del Carmen on the coast, Xcaret (pronounced Ish-car-*et*) is a 100-hectare (247-acre) ecological theme park with small Maya ruins scattered about the lushly landscaped acres. Visitors can put on life jackets and snorkeling gear and ride the currents through more than a kilometer of well-lit underground caves, or don a Sea-Trek helmet and walk across the ocean floor. (You can also swim with dolphins, though this is not included in the cost of excursions.) The park has a botanical garden, an aquarium, a sea-turtle breeding and release facility, a dive shop, a rotating observation tower, a Maya village, and two theaters with worthwhile cultural shows. Excursions run about $99 and take up a full day from Cozumel.

XEL-HA ECO PARK Farther south of Xcaret, Xel-Ha (pronounced Shell-*Ha*) features a sprawling natural lagoon filled with sparkling blue-green water and surrounded by lush foliage. The use of inner tubes and life vests is included in the admission price,

and you can spend a great couple of hours wending your way from one end of the snaking body of calm water to the other, accompanied by schools of tropical fish—or you can just chill on a beach chair and grab lunch from one of the restaurants. Xel-Ha has dolphins, too, and snorkeling gear, snuba (a combination of snorkeling and scuba), and sea-trekking are also available at additional cost. Alternatively, you can take a trail walk with a knowledgeable, eco-minded guide who will identify local plants and take you to sacred cenote sinkholes where ancient Mayas made offerings to the gods.

COZUMEL

The ancient Mayas, who lived here for 12 centuries, would be shocked by the two-million-plus cruise passengers who now visit Cozumel each year, and by the fast-food, raucous-bar, and power-shopping character of San Miguel. Outside town, though, development hasn't destroyed the island's natural beauty, and there are still acres of low-lying scrub forest containing protected plant and animal species. Offshore, the government has set aside 32km (20 miles) of coral reefs as an underwater national park, including the stunning **Palancar Reef,** the world's second-largest natural coral formation.

COMING ASHORE The **Puerto Maya** pier, about 5km (3 miles) south of tourist hub San Miguel, has recently reopened after being destroyed by a hurricane in 2005. The busy International Pier (a bit closer to town) and San Miguel's centrally located Punta Langosta cruise pier were also damaged, but are now back in commission. Up to four megaships can dock at these two piers; additional ships arriving on busy days must anchor offshore. Both Puerto Maya and the International Pier are a $10 taxi ride from town. The beaches are close to the International Pier.

GETTING AROUND The town of San Miguel is so small, you can walk anywhere you want to go. For pedestrians, the classic grid layout makes it easy to get around, though note that all odd-numbered streets are on the south side of the pier and all even-numbered streets are heading north. Essentially, there's only one major road on the island—it starts at the northern tip, hugs the western shoreline, then loops around the southern tip and returns through the middle of the island to the capital.

Taxis are available at the piers; the average fare from San Miguel to most major resorts and beaches is about $25. More distant island rides cost $25 and up. It's customary to overcharge cruise ship passengers, so settle on a fare before getting in. **Motor scooters** and **mopeds** are also a popular means of getting around (though be careful!), and can be rented from (among others) **Auto Rent** (✆ **987/872-3532**), in the Hotel El Cid La Ceiba, right next to the International Pier. The cost is about $35 per day, including helmet; insurance is an extra $6.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

See "Maya Ruins & Other Mainland Attractions," above, for details on the big mainland excursions. In addition to the tours below, the cruise lines offer dozens of different snorkeling, party-boat, and underwater excursions.

Tropical 4×4 Safari Tour ($89, 5 hr.): Hop in a four-seat jeep, draw straws to see who gets to drive, and explore the natural side of Cozumel. Much of the roller-coaster-like route is off road, and the jeeps travel in a convoy, stopping eventually at a lovely secluded beach for swimming, snorkeling, and a picnic lunch.

Maya Frontier Horseback Riding ($89, 4 hr.): Worthwhile horseback-riding tours allow a chance to see Cozumel's landscape, but although they tout visits to Maya ruins, don't get your hopes up—there's little more than a few refrigerator-size rocks here and there on Cozumel. A bus transports riders to a ranch, where the ride begins.

Segway Tour ($89, 3 hr.): Mount up on a Segway Human Transporter for a ride along a scenic bike track that parallels the Caribbean, ending with swimming and snorkeling time.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Avenida Rafael Melgar, the principal street along the waterfront, traces the western shore of the island, site of the best resorts and beaches. Most of the shops and restaurants are along this street. The things to do here are basically shop and drink, and boy oh boy, are there a lot of choices!

Carlos 'n Charlie's, av. Rafael Melgar 551 (✆ **987/869-1647;** www.carlosandcharlies.com), is Mexico's equivalent of the Hard Rock Cafe, but much wilder. Though it moved a few years ago from its old beer-slopped digs into a more sterile Houlihan's-style space right across from the Punta Langosta pier, it's still got deafening music with tourists dancing and gulping down yard-long glasses of beer. Many a cruise passenger has stumbled back from this place clutching a souvenir glass as if it were the Holy Grail—dubious proof of a visit to Mexico. Another party spot includes **Fat Tuesday,** at the end of the International Pier (✆ **987/872-5130**), where 16-ounce margaritas cost $6 a pop and 24-ounce versions a few bucks more.

If that's not your scene, you can drop into the small **Museo de la Isla de Cozumel,** on Rafael Melgar between calles 4 and 6 North (✆ **987/872-1475**). Once Cozumel's first luxury hotel, it now displays exhibits that take you from pre-Hispanic times through the colonial era to the present. Admission is $3.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

About a $10 taxi ride from the center of San Miguel is the **Chankanaab Nature Park,** Carretera Sur, Km 9 (no phone), where a saltwater lagoon, offshore reefs, and underwater caves have been turned into an archaeological park, botanical garden, and wildlife sanctuary. More than 10 countries have contributed seedlings and cuttings. Some 60 species of marine life occupy the lagoon, including sea turtles and captive dolphins (swim with them for $150 for 1 hr., ages 6 and up). Reproductions of Maya dwellings are scattered throughout the park. There's also a wide white-sand beach with thatch umbrellas and a changing area with lockers and showers. Both scuba divers and snorkelers enjoy examining the sunken ship offshore; there are four dive shops here. Admission is $11. The 10-minute taxi ride from the downtown tender and ferry pier (Muelle Fiscal) costs about $15.

The few Maya ruins on Cozumel—**San Gervasio** (north of San Miguel), once a ceremonial center and capital, and **El Cedral** (to the south), site of a Maya arch and a few small ruins covered in heavy growth—are very, very minor compared to those on the mainland, and worth visiting only if you happen to be in the neighborhood (visiting Playa San Francisco, say, which lies about 3.2km/2 miles from El Cedral).

BEACHES

Cozumel's best powdery white-sand beach, **Playa San Francisco,** stretches for some 5km (3 miles) along the southwestern shoreline. You can rent equipment for watersports here, or have lunch at one of the many palapa restaurants and bars on the shoreline.

There's no admission to the beach, and it's about a $10 taxi ride south of San Miguel's downtown pier. If you land at the International Pier, you're practically at the beach already.

Playa Mia (formerly called Playa del Sol) is a fine beach about a mile south of Playa San Francisco, but because it has a big reputation, it's likely to be wall to wall with your fellow cruisers. It's also built up with bars, restaurants, watersports rentals, a miniature zoo, underwater re-creations of all the major Maya ruins and more, and charges a $6 entrance fee.

Playa Bonita (sometimes called Punta Chiqueros) is one of the least crowded beaches; it lies on the east (windward) side of the island and is difficult to reach unless you rent a vehicle or throw yourself at the mercy of a taxi driver. It sits in a moon-shaped cove sheltered from the Caribbean Sea by an offshore reef. Waves are only moderate, the sand is powdery, and the water is clear.

If you don't want to go far, two hotel beaches are a stone's throw north of the International Pier (facing the water, they're on the right). Both welcome day visitors to use their small beach, cabanas, pools, and changing facilities. **El Cid La Ceiba** charges a hefty $68 per person for the day, while the **Park Royale** charges $75, which includes all drinks, snacks, and lunch.

SHOPPING

Wall-to-wall shops along the waterfront in San Miguel, starting right across the street from the Punta Langosta pier and stretching in every direction, sell the usual tourist goods, Mexican crafts, and especially **silver jewelry,** which is big business here. The latter is generally sold by weight. Because of the influx of cruise ship passengers, prices are relatively high, but you can and should bargain. The International Pier and Puerto Maya have on-pier gift shops.

PLAYA DEL CARMEN

Some cruise ships spend a day at Cozumel and then anchor offshore at Playa del Carmen for another day, but most ferry passengers to Playa from Cozumel for tours to Tulum and Chichén Itzá, then head on to spend the day docked at Cozumel. Despite the ongoing threat of hurricanes, Playa Del Carmen continues to grow like crazy, catering to an endless parade of tourists who pass their time on the beach, perched at an outdoor bar, or wandering through the laid-back yet colorful scene for which Mexico is famous. Take your snorkel, enjoy the beach, and then stroll the many shops along Avenida 5.

COMING ASHORE Some cruise ships anchor offshore or at the pier of Cozumel, then send passengers over to Playa del Carmen by tender. Others dock at the **Puerto Calica Cruise Pier** (which doubles as a dock for cement freighters), 13km (8 miles) south of Playa del Carmen. Taxis meet each arriving ship here, and drivers transport visitors into the center of Playa del Carmen—which is a good thing, as there's nothing to do at Calica besides making a phone call or buying a soda.

GETTING AROUND The ferry dock is right in town, near the beach and most major shops. You probably won't need them, but **taxis** are available to take you anywhere. If you'd like to drive your own vehicle for the day, Avis, Budget, Hertz, and National all have **car-rental** offices right next to the ferry pier.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Most visitors head for the Maya ruins or one of the local water parks as soon as they reach shore (see "Best Cruise Line Shore Excursions" in the "Cozumel" section, above).

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

From the ferry docks, you can walk to the center of Playa del Carmen, to the beach, and to the small but ever-expanding shopping district with its trendy boutiques and hip restaurants. **Señor Frog's,** right at the ferry pier (✆ **984/873-0930**), is another of those "all the beer and shots you can stomach" places, like **Carlos 'n Charlie's** (✆ **984/803-3498**), which sits just up the street. For all attractions beyond town, see "Maya Ruins & Other Mainland Attractions," p. 518.

SHOPPING

From the tender pier, you are funneled like cattle right into the **Paseo del Carmen Shopping Mall.** Most shops are along Avenida 5, which runs parallel to the coast and has a pedestrian-only stretch not far from the dock. The **Rincon del Sol** plaza is a tree-filled courtyard between Calle 4 and Calle 6, built in the colonial Mexican style. It has the best collection of handicrafts shops in the area, some with better-quality items than the junky souvenirs peddled elsewhere.

COSTA MAYA

Costa Maya is near the sleepy fishing village of Mahajual, just over 161km (100 miles) south of Playa del Carmen and not too far from the Mexico/Belize border. It took an almost direct hit by Hurricane Dean in mid-2007, as did the town of Mahajual.

COMING ASHORE Costa Maya is a self-contained port stop, and you're dropped off right at the purpose-built facilities.

GETTING AROUND **Taxis** line up just outside the pier, and are the only way of getting to sites beyond walking distance. Because of this, prices are steep and non-negotiable.

9 Curaçao

Welcome to Curaçao (pronounced Coo-ra-*sow*), the largest and most populous of the Netherlands Antilles, just 56km (35 miles) north of the Venezuelan coast. Because much of the island's surface is arid, Dutch settlers in the 17th century developed it into a trading post rather than trying to farm it; a huge oil-processing operation here in the early 20th century resulted in a large population influx and today's curious mixture of bloodlines, including African, Dutch, Venezuelan, and Pakistani. Today, the island still retains a Dutch flavor, especially in **Willemstad,** whose harbor is bordered by rows of picture-postcard, pastel-colored, gabled Dutch colonial houses. While these structures give the town a storybook appearance, the rest of the island looks like the American Southwest, its desertlike landscape dotted with three-pronged cacti, spiny-leafed aloes, and divi-divi trees bent by trade winds.

COMING ASHORE As you sail into the harbor of Willemstad, be sure to look for the quaint **Queen Emma floating pontoon bridge,** which swings aside to open the narrow channel. It was removed for renovations and is now back in service. One large cruise ship at a time can dock at the upgraded megapier just beyond the bridge at **Rif Otrobanda,** which leads to the duty-free shopping sector and the famous Floating Market in downtown Willemstad. Adjacent to the megapier, the Rif Fort Renaissance hotel and entertainment development has integrated shops, restaurants, and a casino into this historic landmark. A second megapier is being planned adjacent to the first, with a targeted completion date sometime in 2010. Three to four smaller cruise ships

may dock inside the entrance channel at the **St. Annabay Wharves;** there is no anchorage for passenger ships.

GETTING AROUND From the pier, it's a 5- to 10-minute walk to the center of town, or you can take a **taxi** from the stand. The town itself is easy to navigate on foot. Most of it can be explored in 2 or 3 hours, leaving plenty of time for beaches or watersports. Taxi drivers waiting at the cruise dock will take you to any of the beaches. To be on the safe side, arrange to have your driver pick you up at a certain time and take you back to the cruise dock. Up to four passengers can share the price of an island tour by taxi, which costs about $50 per hour.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **Dutch, Spanish,** and **English** are spoken on Curaçao, along with the local tongue, **Papiamentu.** The official currency is the **Netherlands Antilles guilder** (ANG), (1.78 ANG = US$1; 1 ANG = US56¢). Most places accept U.S. dollars for purchases.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Many excursions aren't really worth the price here—you can easily see the town on your own and hop a taxi to the few attractions on the island outside of Willemstad.

Spanish Water Kayaking & Snorkeling ($69, 3½ hr.): At Jan Sofat, you'll board kayaks for a paddle through the Spanish Water Lagoon, heading for Barbara Beach. Swim and relax before paddling back.

Exploring Curaçao's Jewish Heritage ($52, 3½ hr.): Jews have lived on Curaçao since the mid–17th century. On this tour, participants visit the Mikve Emmanuel Israel synagogue (the Western Hemisphere's oldest) as well as Beth Haim Cemetery (consecrated in 1659) and Landhouse Bloemhof, with its collections of art and artifacts from Curaçao's Jewish past.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Willemstad is the major attraction here, and you can see it on foot. After years of restoration, the town's historic center and the island's natural harbor, Schottegat, have been inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage list. Be sure to watch the **Queen Emma pontoon bridge** in action. It's motorized, and a man actually drives it to the side of the harbor every so often to allow ships and boats to pass through the channel—it's the coolest thing to see. In the **Brionplein** square at the Otrabanda end of the bridge, a statue commemorates Curaçao-born Pedro Luis Brion, who fought for the independence of Venezuela and Colombia as an admiral under Simón Bolívar. **Fort Amsterdam,** site of the Governor's Palace and the 1769 Dutch Reformed church, has the task of guarding the waterfront. The church still has a British cannonball embedded in it. A corner of the fort stands at the intersection of Breedestraat and Handelskade, the starting point for a plunge into the island's major shopping district.

A few minutes' walk from the pontoon bridge, at the north end of Handelskade, is the **Floating Market,** where scores of fishing boats arrive from Venezuela, Colombia, and neighboring West Indian islands, tying up alongside the canal to sell tropical fruits, vegetables, and handicrafts.

Between the I. H. (Sha) Capriles Kade and Fort Amsterdam, at the corner of Columbusstraat and Hanchi di Snoa, is the **Mikve Israel-Emanuel Synagogue.** Dating from 1651, the Jewish congregation here is the oldest in the New World. The sand that blankets the floor symbolizes the Jews' years of wandering in the desert. Next door, the **Jewish Cultural Historical Museum,** Hanchi Snoa 29 (✆ **599/9-461-1633;**

www.snoa.com), is housed in two buildings dating from 1728. Entry is through the synagogue; open weekdays from 9am to 4:30pm. Admission is $6.

The sleepy **Curaçao Museum,** Van Leeuwenhoekstraat (✆ **599/9-462-3873;** www.curacaomuseum.an), is housed in a restored 1853 building constructed by the Royal Dutch Army as a military hospital. Today, it displays paintings, objets d'art, and antique furniture, as well as a large collection from the Caiquetio tribes. Admission is $4.50. The **Museum Kurla Hulanda** ★ Kipstraat 9 (✆ **599/9-434-7765**) is one of the most unusual and riveting museums in the Caribbean. Housed in once dilapidated 19th-century buildings, the exhibits display the dismal history of slave trading, a major part of the island's past. Admission is $9 adults, $6 children and seniors.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

Cacti, bromeliads, rare orchids, iguanas, donkeys, wild goats, and many species of birds thrive in the **Christoffel National Park** (✆ **599/9-864-0363**), about a 30-minute taxi or car ride from the capital near the northwestern tip of Curaçao. The park rises from flat, arid countryside to 369m (1,211-ft.) **St. Christoffelberg,** the tallest point in the Dutch Leewards. Along the way are ancient Arawak paintings and the **Piedra di Monton,** a rock heap piled by African slaves who cleared this former plantation. According to legend, slaves could climb to the top of the rock pile, jump off, and fly back home across the Atlantic to Africa. If they had ever tasted a grain of salt, however, they would crash to their deaths. The park has 32km (20 miles) of one-way trail-like roads. The shortest is about 8km (5 miles) long, but takes 40 minutes to drive because of its rough terrain. One of several hiking trails goes to the top of St. Christoffelberg. It takes about 1½ hours to walk to the summit (come early in the morning before it gets hot; trails open at 7:30am). Admission is $10.

The **Curaçao Sea Aquarium,** off Bhpor Kibra (✆ **599/9-461-6666;** www.curacao-sea-aquarium.com), displays more than 400 species of fish, crabs, anemones, and other invertebrates, sponges, and coral. Admission is $19. It also has an "Animal Encounter" experience and various **dolphin swims,** starting at $159 (✆ **599/9-465-8900;** www.dolphin-academy.com). Nonswimmers can enjoy the impressive dolphin show and invertebrate touch tank.

Stalactites are mirrored in a mystical underground lake in **Hato Caves,** F. D. Rosseveltweg (✆ **599/9-868-0379**). Long ago, geological forces uplifted this limestone terrace, originally a coral reef. The limestone formations were created over thousands of years by water seeping through the coral. After crossing the lake, you enter two caverns known as the Cathedral and La Ventana ("The Window"), where you'll see samples of ancient Indian petroglyphs. Local guides take visitors through every hour starting at 10am. Admission is $8.

BEACHES

Curaçao has some 38 beaches, but in general, they aren't as good as others in the region. The **Curaçao Sea Aquarium** has the island's only full-facility, white-sand, palm-shaded beach, but you'll have to pay the full aquarium admission to get in (see "On Your Own: Beyond the Port Area," above).

The rest of the beaches are public. Southeast of Willemstad, **Santa Barbara Beach** sits on land owned by a mining company between the open sea and the island's primary watersports and recreational area, known as **Spanish Water.** It has pure white sand and calm water; a buoy line protects swimmers from boats; and there are restrooms, changing rooms, watersports equipment, and a snack bar. The beach has access

to the **Curaçao Underwater Park** (✆ **599/9-462-4242**), which stretches from the Breezes Resort to the eastern tip of Curaçao and has some of the island's finest reefs.

Blauwbaai (Blue Bay), just north of town, is the largest and most frequented beach on Curaçao; with a $3 entry fee, there's enough white sand for everybody. Along with showers and changing facilities, there are plenty of shady places to retreat from the noonday sun. At the top of the island, **Westpunt** is known for its gigantic cliffs and the Sunday divers who plunge off them. **Knip Bay** and **Playa Abao,** just south of Westpunt, have lovely turquoise waters.

SHOPPING

Curaçao is a shopper's paradise, with more than 100 stores lining Heerenstraat, Breedestraat, and other streets in the 5-block district called the **Punda.** Many shops occupy the town's old Dutch houses.

The island is famous for its 2.2kg (5-lb.) "wheelers" of Gouda and Edam cheese. Also look for good buys on French perfumes, Dutch blue Delft souvenirs, finely woven Italian silks, Japanese and German cameras, jewelry, silver, Swiss watches, linens, leather goods, and liquor, along with island-made rum and liqueurs, especially Curaçao liqueur, with its distinctive blue color. Some stores have good buys on intricate lacework imported from regions between Portugal and China. If you're a street shopper and want something colorful, consider a carving or flamboyant painting from Haiti or the Dominican Republic; both are hawked by street vendors at main plazas.

10 Dominica

First things first. It's pronounced Dome-i-*nee*-ka, not Doe-*min*-i-ka. And it has nothing to do with the Dominican Republic. The Commonwealth of Dominica is an independent country, and English, not Spanish, is the official language. The only Spanish commonly understood in Dominica is *mal encaminado a Santo Domingo* ("accidentally sent to the Dominican Republic"), the phrase stamped on many letters that arrive here only after an erroneous detour.

Dominica is the lushest and most mountainous island in the eastern Caribbean, a 47×26km (29×16-mile) swath of land with 365 crystal-clear rivers (one for every day of the year), dramatic waterfalls, volcanic lakes, and gargantuan foliage, all accessible via river trips or hikes along undemanding jungle trails. Dominica served as a backdrop for the second and third *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies, and many of the locations in the film are easily recognized. The island's people, primarily descendants of the West African slaves, are another great natural resource. Don't be surprised when you're greeted with a smile and an "okay," the island's equivalent of "hi." Unfortunately, in the capital Roseau, tourism is a still-developing industry; but the town has a feel of authenticity lacking in other, more developed island towns. The island is also notable for its population of some 3,000 Caribe Indians, the last remaining descendants of the people who dominated the region when Europeans arrived.

COMING ASHORE Dominica has three cruise ship ports, each handling one ship at a time. The most frequented is the cruise ship berth in the heart of **Roseau,** the country's capital and largest town. The **Woodbridge Bay** port is about a mile north of Roseau, and the other is the Cabrits cruise berth, near the northwestern town of **Portsmouth,** with a tourist welcome center and quick access to Fort Shirley and Cabrits National Park. Additional cruise ships must anchor offshore and tender passengers to the terminal (which takes about 5 min.). Plans for expanding the Woodbridge

Bay cruise port are perpetually in the works, with the idea of increasing the docking capacity to three ships and creating a "cruise village" with shops, restaurants, and other amenities. Aaaaaany day now.

GETTING AROUND **Taxis** and **public minivans** are designated by license plates that begin with the letters *H, HA,* or *HB.* Also look for a round decal on the front of the car and the pink-and-green badges that signify that the driver is a certified tourism operator. Fleets of both await cruise ship passengers at the Roseau and Portsmouth docks. Drivers are generally knowledgeable about attractions and local history, and the standard sightseeing rate averages $25 per site per person. The vehicles are unmetered, and while prices are technically set by the government, you should negotiate a price in advance and make sure you and the driver are talking about the same currency.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **English** is Dominica's official language. The **Eastern Caribbean dollar** (EC$2.71 = US$1; EC$1 = US37¢) is its official currency, but U.S. dollars are accepted almost everywhere.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Trafalgar Falls & Sulfur Springs ($62, 5 hr.): Travel to the island's interior and visit two of Dominica's most stunning wonders: beautiful Trafalgar Falls and a thermal sulfur spring; then drive to Morne Bruce for a panoramic view of Roseau and learn about local flora and fauna at the Botanical Gardens. Proceed to a lookout point for a majestic view of Trafalgar Falls. After another drive, you take a 15-minute walk along a relatively easy trail to the thermal sulfur springs that are so hot, you can actually boil an egg in them.

Carib Indian Territory & Emerald Pool ($75, 5 hr.): The tour stops at the Emerald Pool before heading to a rugged portion of Dominica's northeastern coast, where the 1,327-hectare (3,278-acre) Carib Territory is home to the world's last surviving Carib Indians. The Caribs today live like most other rural islanders—growing bananas and coconuts, fishing, and operating small shops—but their sturdy baskets of dyed and woven larouma reeds and wooden canoes carved from the trunks of massive gommier trees are evidence of their links to the past. Kalinago Barana Aute, the "Carib Cultural Village by the Sea," honors the diversity, history, and heritage of the Kalinago people. Lunch is included.

River Tubing & Emerald Pool Adventure ($76, 4 hr.): A 40-minute drive takes you into the Layou Valley, where tubing guides take you down the river lined with tall, overhanging cliffs and lush vegetation. A longer version of this tour also visits the Emerald Pool.

Dominica by Jeep & Swimming at the Titou Gorge ($89, 3½ hr.): A jeep convoy heads up Morne Bruce for a picturesque view, stopping at the Botanical Gardens and the Wotten Waven Sulphur Springs before arriving at the volcanic Titou Gorge. Here, sheer 6m (20-ft.) black walls, rock outcrops, caves, and a thundering waterfall provide an exhilarating swimming experience. Scenes from *Pirates of the Caribbean* were filmed here.

Whale & Dolphin Watching ($68, 3½ hrs.): Dominica has been hailed by some marine biologists as one of the most reliable spots to see sperm whales. Board a motorized vessel and cruise to a point approximately 13km (8 miles) offshore. As you search for marine mammals, your guide provides a running commentary on marine life found off Dominica. Whales and dolphins are usually spotted on the surface or

located with an underwater hydrophone. The deep waters surrounding Dominica are a natural breeding ground for sperm whales.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

IN ROSEAU As you come ashore, you'll see the **Dominica Museum,** which faces the bayfront. Housed in an old market building dating from 1810, the museum's permanent exhibit provides a clear and interesting overview of the island's geology, history, archaeology, economy, and culture. The displays on pre-Columbian peoples, the slave trade, and the Fighting Maroons—slaves who resisted their white owners and established their own communities—are particularly informative. Admission is $3. It's usually closed Sundays, but opens when a ship is in port.

It took more than 100 years to build the **Roseau Cathedral of Our Lady of Fair Heaven,** on Virgin Lane. Made of cut volcanic stone in the Gothic-Romanesque Revival style, it was finally completed in 1916. The original funds to build it were raised from levies on French planters; Caribs erected the first wooden ceiling frame, and convicts on Devil's Island built the pulpit.

On the eastern edge of Roseau, the **Botanical Gardens** lie at the base of Morne Bruce, the mountain overlooking the town. The gardens were established at the end of the 19th century to encourage crop diversification and to provide farmers with correctly propagated seedlings. London's Kew Gardens provided exotic plants collected from every corner of the tropical world, and experiments to discover what could grow in Dominica revealed that everything does.

IN PORTSMOUTH The cruise ship dock at Portsmouth leads directly to 104-hectare (260-acre) **Cabrits National Park,** with its stunning mountain scenery, tropical deciduous forest and swampland, volcanic-sand beaches, and coral reefs. Also in the park is the 18th-century **Fort Shirley,** comprising more than 50 major structures and one of the most impressive and historic military complexes in the West Indies. Admission is $5.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREAS

Approximately 15 to 20 minutes by car from Roseau, **Trafalgar Falls** is actually two separate falls referred to as "the mother and the father falls." The cascading white torrents dazzle in the sunlight before pummeling the black-lava boulders below. The surrounding foliage is in countless shades of green. To reach the lookout to the natural pool at the base of the falls, you'll have to step gingerly along slippery rocks, so don't attempt the climb if it makes you nervous.

Hard-core masochists have an easy choice—the forced march through the **Valley of Desolation** to **Boiling Lake.** Experienced guides say this 6-hour hike is like spending hours on a maximally resistant Stairmaster. So why would any sane person endure this hell? To breathe in the harsh, sulfuric fumes that have killed all but the hardiest vegetation? Because the idea of baking a potato in the steam rising from the earth is irresistible? Maybe to feel the thrill that comes with the risk of breaking through the thin crust separating you from hot lava? Or could it be the final destination, the wide cauldron of bubbling, slate-blue water of unknown depth? Don't even think about taking a dip in this flooded fumarole: The water temperature is about 190°F (88°C). Can we sign you up?

Other beautiful natural areas of the island are discussed in "Best Cruise Line Shore Excursions," above.

BEACHES

If your sole focus is beaches, you'll likely find Dominica disappointing. Much of the seacoast is rocky, and many beaches have dark, volcanic sand. There are golden-sand beaches as well, but all are on the northern coast, quite far from Roseau.

SHOPPING

In addition to the usual duty-free items, Dominica sells handicrafts and art not obtainable anywhere else, most notably **Carib Indian baskets** made of dyed larouma reeds and balizier (heliconia) leaves, their designs handed down from generation to generation. More than souvenirs, these baskets are a real link to the pre-Columbian Caribbean, and some of the most "authentic" items you can buy in the whole Caribbean. You can buy Carib crafts directly from the craftspeople in the Carib Territory or at various outlets in Roseau. Prices are ridiculously reasonable.

In Roseau, the cobbled **Old Market Square** is a bustling market directly behind the Dominica Museum, selling mostly handicrafts and souvenirs. At **Tropicrafts,** at the corner of Queen Mary Street and Turkey Lane, you can watch local women weave grass mats with varied and complex designs. The large store also stocks Carib baskets, locally made soaps and toiletries, rums, jellies, condiments, woodcarvings, and masks made from the trunks of giant fougère ferns.

11 Grand Cayman

Flat, relatively unattractive, and full of scrubland and swamps, Grand Cayman and its sister islands (Cayman Brac and Little Cayman) nevertheless boast more than their share of upscale, expensive private homes and condos, owned by millionaire expatriates from all over who come because of the tiny nation's lenient tax and banking laws. (Enron, the poster child of shady business dealings, reportedly had more than 690 different subsidiaries here to help avoid paying U.S. taxes.) Grand Cayman is also popular because of its laid-back civility—so civil that ships aren't allowed to visit on Sunday. **George Town** is the colony's capital and its commercial hub, and many hotels line the sands of the nation's most famous sunspot, **Seven-Mile Beach.** Scuba divers and snorkelers come for the coral reefs and other formations, some within swimming distance of the shoreline.

In 2004, Hurricane Ivan tore through Grand Cayman, causing substantial flooding, destroying many homes and businesses, and severely damaging power and sewage networks. Things were such a mess that the island was officially closed to tourists for 2 months. However, with tourism accounting for some 45% of the Caymans' GDP, cleanup was swift, and things are more or less back to normal.

COMING ASHORE Typically, up to nine cruise ships can anchor off **George Town** and ferry passengers to a pier at the cruise terminal on Harbour Drive, right in the midst of George Town's shopping district. Future plans include berthing for up to four cruise ships, but work has not yet begun. A unique feature of this port is that some tour and dive operators have their own water shuttles that go out to greet the ships and take booked passengers directly to their activities, eliminating the ride to shore via boat.

GETTING AROUND **Taxis** line up at the pier to meet cruise ship passengers. Fares are fixed; typical one-way fares range from $12 to $20. **Motor scooters** and **bicycles** are another way to get around. **Island Scooter Rental** (✆ **345/949-2046**), at Bernard Drive in Industrial Park, has shuttle service to and from George Town and

rents scooters for $30 a day. A public **bus service** has recently started, with inexpensive service to local attractions for about $1.50 to $2 one-way.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **English** is the official language of the islands. The legal tender is the **Cayman Islands dollar** (CI81¢ = US$1; CI$1 = US$1.22), but U.S. dollars are commonly accepted. Be sure to note which currency is used on price tags before making a purchase.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Cruise lines typically offer about 30 shore excursions here, most of the swimming, snorkeling, sailing, submarine, and glass-bottom-boat variety.

Stingray City ($47–$78, 2–3 hr.): The waters off Grand Cayman are home to Stingray City, one of the world's most unusual underwater attractions. Set in very shallow waters of North Sound, about 2 miles east of the island's northwestern tip, the site was discovered in the mid-1980s when local fishermen noticed that scores of stingrays showed up to feed on the offal dumped overboard. Today, anywhere from 30 to 100 relatively tame stingrays swarm around the hundreds of visiting snorkelers like so many aquatic basset hounds, eager for handouts. The guides bring buckets of squid and show you the correct way to feed the stingrays, which sort of suck the food right out of your hand. Stingrays are terribly gentle creatures, and love to have their bellies rubbed, but never try to grab one by the tail—their barbed stingers are indeed poisonous, and although rarely a genuine threat to one's life, they can inflict a lot of pain. Be sure to bring your waterproof camera for this one.

***Atlantis* Submarine Expedition** ($105, 1½ hr., including 45-min. dive): Board a 48-passenger sub and descend to 100 feet through coral canyons, while an automatic fish feeder draws swarms of colorful marine creatures.

Cayman Cycling ($72, 3 hr.): Pick up your touring mountain bike at the Spanish Bay Reef Resort and ride along the rugged coastline of Boatswain Bay and the palm-covered country lanes of the Cobalt Coast. On the final leg, participants can visit the Turtle Farm and the post office in Hell before returning to the Spanish Bay.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

In George Town, the small **Cayman Islands National Museum,** Harbour Drive (✆ **345/949-8368;** www.museum.ky), is housed in a veranda-fronted building that once served as the island's courthouse. Today, the formal exhibits include a collection of Caymanian artifacts collected by Ira Thompson beginning in the 1930s, and the museum comprises a gift shop, theater, cafe, and more than 2,000 items portraying the natural, social, and cultural history of the Caymans. Hours are Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, Saturday from 10am to 2pm. Admission is $4 for adults, $2 for seniors and students.

The **National Gallery of the Cayman Islands,** Harbour Place, South Church Street (✆ **345/945-8111;** www.nationalgallery.org.ky), is an educational nonprofit organization that supports the growth of the Cayman Islands arts scene; it has an average of eight exhibitions each year of both local and international art. Admission is free; closed Sunday.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

For years, one of Grand Cayman's most popular attractions has been the **Cayman Turtle Farm** (✆ **345/949-3894**), the only green-sea-turtle farm of its kind in the world.

Once a multitude of turtles lived in the waters surrounding the Cayman Islands, but today these creatures are an endangered species. The turtle farm's purpose is twofold: to replenish the waters with hatchlings and yearling turtles and, at the other end of the spectrum, to provide the local market with edible turtle meat. You can peer into about 100 circular concrete tanks containing turtles ranging in size from 6 ounces to 600 pounds, or sample turtle dishes at a snack bar and restaurant. The turtle farm is now part of a 9.2-hectare (23-acre) marine park called **Boatswain's Beach** (pronounced *Boe*-suns; www.boatswainsbeach.ky), which will also include a snorkeling lagoon, a predator tank full of sharks and moray eels, a separate tank for dolphin swims, an aviary, a nature trail, and other mostly marine-oriented displays. Many, but not all, of the exhibits are completed. Admission is $55 for adults and $25 for children, which includes access to the entire facility. Admission for the Turtle Farm only is $30 for adults and $20 for kids.

The nearby town of **Hell** is mostly notable for its name (and the T-shirts bearing it), but there are also some unusual rock formations from which the town got its name. If you mail your postcards from here, guess what the postmark says.

BEACHES

Lined with condominiums and plush resorts, **Seven-Mile Beach** begins north of George Town, an easy taxi ride from the cruise dock. It has sparkling white sands with a backdrop of casuarina trees, and is known for its array of watersports and translucent aquamarine waters. The average water temperature is a balmy 80°F (27°C).

SHOPPING

There's duty-free shopping here for silver, china, crystal, Irish linens, and British woolen goods, but we've found most prices to be similar to those in the U.S. You'll also find cigar shops and international chains. Don't succumb and purchase turtle or black-coral products. You'll see them everywhere, but it's illegal to bring them back into the U.S. and most other Western nations.

12 Grand Turk

Welcome to the Caribbean's newest cruise port. Just 11km (6¾ miles) long and about 2km (1¼ miles) wide, with 3,700 residents, Grand Turk has long been known as one of the top five diving destinations in the world. The reason? Just a few hundred yards from shore, the shallow continental shelf suddenly plunges 2,135m (7,000 ft.) straight down, with healthy coral reefs and great visibility making conditions absolutely perfect. The whole western shore of the island is a protected underwater park. Above water, things are practically perfect too, with an average temperature of 83°F (28°C) and an amazing 350 days of sunshine a year. It can reach the 90s (30s Celsius) in the summer, but the surprisingly strong trade winds keep things comfy.

Though ships had visited the island in the past, it really wasn't equipped to handle a massive influx of passengers until the Grand Turk Cruise Center opened in February 2006, its deepwater pier accommodating even the largest megaships. Carnival was the prime mover behind the project, leasing 15 hectares (37 acres) from the government and developing less than half of them, building a transportation center, restaurant, shopping area, crafts stalls, fountains, and a duty-free building. The cruise center welcomes all ships, not just Carnival lines.

About 5km (3 miles) from the pier is charming downtown **Cockburn Town,** a sleepy half-mile stretch that also happens to be the administrative capital of the Turks

and Caicos Islands. Along its streets, Bermudan-influenced colonial buildings sit beside simple gift shops, guesthouses, and a couple of laid-back bars; all are near miles of public powder-white beaches. Islanders describe the ambience here as how the rest of the Caribbean was 25 years ago. A bit neglected over the years, Grand Turk received a $7-million boost from Carnival for infrastructure improvements, ranging from pedestrian crossings to the creation of ready-made tourist attractions based on the island's substantive history.

So far, Grand Turk retains its air of quaintness, but developers are moving in. This is one port you should make a special effort to visit as soon as possible.

COMING ASHORE Located on the south side of Grand Turk, the **Grand Turk Cruise Center** may seem to arriving passengers like one of the cruise lines' private islands, with its carefully placed landscaping between the dock and the beach. Its advantages, of course, are that (a) it's part of a real country, and (b) passengers don't have to tender ashore because the cruise pier can accommodate the largest ships. However, in the event that two ships are at the pier, a third must then drift (ships may not anchor) and tender passengers ashore, usually no more than a 10-minute ride. At the cruise center, you can get visitor info, rent a car, eat, drink, shop, or catch a taxi or water taxi into Cockburn Town, about 5km (3 miles) away.

GETTING AROUND **Taxi** fares from the port to Cockburn Town run about $10 for the first person and $4 for each additional person, but get a quote from the driver before you commit. There's no public transportation on the island, but one shore excursion offered by the cruise lines is a **bus loop** and you can hop off and on at will (see below). **Car-rental** desks are found at the cruise terminal, but if you want a car, be sure to book ahead, as supplies are limited. Also be prepared to drive on the left side of the road, as the Turks and Caicos are a British colony.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **English** is spoken everywhere. The official currency is the **U.S. dollar,** but there's local currency called the TCI crown (equivalent in value to the dollar) and a quarter, either of which is a nice souvenir.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

In addition to the excursions listed here, **whale-watching** is added to ships' offerings on an ad-hoc basis. It has to be the right season and the right weather. Atlantic humpback whales travel down Turk's Passage trench on the western side of the island every year, heading for their breeding grounds south of Grand Turk, where they take care of their calves from January to April. Otherwise, the thing to do in Grand Turk is to get underwater.

Scuba Diving ($135, 4 hr.): You won't get better conditions anywhere in the Caribbean than Grand Turk, with its tranquil, crystal-clear waters and protected reef. Experienced divers will be wowed by the manta rays, whale sharks, and sea turtles, and the beautiful colors of the third-largest coral reef in the world. Even a first-timer can get to the reefs via a resort course, with intensive one-on-one instruction followed by a half-hour of diving.

Snorkeling ($49, 2½ hr.): If you're not up for scuba, you can at least go snorkeling to see the beauty of Grand Turk's undersea world. Snorkeling cruises departing from the cruise terminal visit two sites, typically Horseshoe Reef (with depths averaging 1.8–3.7m/6–12 ft.) and a reef off Round Cay, one of Grand Turk's best dive locations.

Grand Turk Helmet Dive ($135, 2 hr.): Yet another way of getting underwater is via a helmet dive, in which a helmet provides a constant air supply as you walk around on the ocean floor.

Hop-On, Hop-Off Island Tour ($45, 2–3 hrs.): Air-conditioned buses loop around the island whenever there's a ship in port, letting booked excursioners see things at their leisure. A wristband allows entry to various tourist venues along the route, including Cockburn Town's Millennium Clock Tower and restored 1800s prison; Lighthouse Park, with its namesake light built in 1852 and two nature trails; the Turks and Caicos National Museum, which has some information on John Glenn's splashdown off Grand Turk in 1962; and the Philatelic Bureau. Anyone who's ever collected stamps will know that Turks and Caicos is well known for its beautiful stamps, created almost solely for collectors. Stops are approximately every half mile along the route, with many close to island attractions. Buses arrive at each stop approximately every 15 minutes.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Passengers could easily spend their whole day just hanging out at the cruise center, whose biggest structure by far is the two-story, 1,579-sq.-m (17,000-sq.-ft.) **Margaritaville Cafe,** the largest stand-alone Jimmy Buffett franchise in the Caribbean. Wastin' away again? Behind the restaurant is a giant amoeba-shaped swimming pool with swim-up bar, slide, cabanas, and infinity-edge view. It's open to the public and, because it's only 1m (3¼ ft.) deep, it makes a great place to hang out with the younger kids.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

Cockburn Town's **historic district** is centered along Duke and Front streets, with houses built of wood and limestone standing along the waterfront. Historic government buildings surround a small plaza where cannons and a bronze plaque mark the spot where Christopher Columbus allegedly first set foot in the New World, on October 14, 1492. Columbus's logbook notes landfall at a bean-shaped island, but there's no absolute proof that said bean was Grand Turk.

Also on Front Street is the **Turks and Caicos National Museum** (✆ **649/946-2160;** www.tcmuseum.org). Housed in 180-year-old Guinep House, the museum has wreckage from a Spanish caravel that sank offshore in shallow water sometime before 1513, plus exhibits on the island's natural history, salt industries, plantation economy, and pre-Columbian inhabitants. Admission is $5.

Just behind Cockburn Town's historic waterfront is the town's **saltwater pond,** and in the middle of that is an island once used to quarantine sick sailors. Today, it's a favorite of birders who come to see some of Grand Turk's 190 bird species, including the flamingos, pelicans, and herons that feed in the pond's shallow waters.

BEACHES

The cruise terminal's powder-white-sand beach is just steps from the pier, and you'll find lounge chairs and hammocks, as well as the bartending staff that comes by to take your drink orders. For $19 a day, you can rent a clamshell shade with room for two lounge chairs. You can also sample the underwater view that makes Grand Turk famous by going snorkeling, with equipment available for rent or purchase.

On the island's southwest coast, below Cockburn Town, **Governor's Beach** is one of the few blue-flagged beaches in the Caribbean, which means it passes stringent tests

for water quality, cleanliness, and lifeguard availability. It's also reputed to have the best snorkeling on the island. Right next door is **Waterloo,** the governor's mansion, a pretty structure with the curved stucco architecture characteristic of Bermudan buildings.

SHOPPING

Grand Turk isn't particularly known for its arts and crafts, though you will find shops at the cruise center and at the island's various attractions and museums, plus a couple along Duke Street, which borders the western beach in the downtown area.

13 Grenada

Once a British crown colony, the now-independent nation of Grenada (Gre-*nay*-dah) produces more spices than any other country in the world, including clove, cinnamon, mace, cocoa, tonka beans, ginger, and a fifth of the world's nutmeg—thus its nickname, the "Spice Island." **St. George's,** the country's capital, is one of the most colorful ports in the West Indies, nearly landlocked in the deep crater of a long-dead volcano, full of charming Georgian colonial buildings, and flanked by old forts. The island's coast is white and sandy, while its interior is a jungle of palms, oleander, bougainvillea, and other tropical foliage, crisscrossed by roads and trails.

Grenada was one of the hardest-hit Caribbean islands during 2004's devastating hurricane season. Almost every building sustained some level of damage, but you can't keep a good island down. Known for its lushness and most extravagant fertility (results of a gentle climate and volcanic soil), Grenada started springing back almost immediately, its coastal greenery growing rapidly and its rainforests filling out slowly. You should, however, expect to see some reminders of the destruction, such as old churches with no roof or windows.

COMING ASHORE Two ships at a time can dock at the modern **Melville Street Cruise Terminal,** plus one more at the main quay. Up to four vessels can anchor in the picturesque St. George's harbor and send passengers on a short tender ride to the pier. Passengers exit the cruise terminal through the Esplanade shopping mall onto the Carenage (St. George's main street).

GETTING AROUND **Taxi** fares are set by the government. A one-way taxi to Grand Anse (one of the Caribbean's best beaches) is about $12 to $15 for up to four passengers. You can also tap most taxi drivers as a guide for a day's sightseeing, for about $25 per hour. **Water taxis** also head from the cruise ship welcome center to Grand Anse; the round-trip fare is about $6.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **English** is commonly spoken on this island, and the official currency is the **Eastern Caribbean dollar** (EC$2.71 = US$1; EC$1 = US37¢), though dollars are widely accepted. Always determine which dollars—EC or U.S.—you're talking about when discussing a price.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Because of Grenada's lush landscape, we recommend spending at least a few hours touring its interior, one of the most scenic in the West Indies.

Hike to Seven Sisters Waterfalls ($64, 4 hr.): After a 40-minute hike along a muddy path in the lush Grand Etang rainforest, passengers are free to take a swim in the natural pools or hop off the edge of the cascading waterfalls. It's gorgeous and lots of fun. Don't forget to wear your bathing suit and maybe a pair of Teva-type sandals.

Island Tour, Grand Etang Lake & Fort Frederick ($42, 4½ hr.): This is a great way to experience Grenada's lush, cool, dripping-wet tropical interior. You travel by bus past the red-tiled roofs of St. George's en route to the Grand Etang Lake, within an extinct volcanic crater some 530m (1,740 ft.) above sea level. A profusion of floating plants hugging the edges gives it more the appearance of an emerald wetland than a crystal blue lake. On the way, you drive through rainforests and stop at a spice estate. Some tours include a visit to Annandale Falls and Fort Frederick.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

In St. George's, you can visit the **Grenada National Museum,** at the corner of Young and Monckton streets (✆ **473/440-3725**), set in the foundations of an old French army barracks and prison built in 1704. Small but interesting, it houses ancient petroglyphs and other archaeological finds, a rum still, Joséphine Bonaparte's bathtub from her girlhood in Martinique, and various Grenada memorabilia. Admission is $2.50 for adults and $1 for kids. Open Monday to Friday from 9am to 4:30pm and Saturday 10am to 1pm.

If you're up for a good hike, walk from the cruise terminal around the historic Carenage and head up to **Fort George,** built in 1705 by the French and originally called Fort Royal. While the fort ruins and the 200- to 300-year-old cannons are worth a peek, it's the 360-degree panoramic views of the entire harbor area that are most spectacular. Look for the bronze plaque commemorating the assassination of the prime minister and several citizens during the unrest in 1983, which resulted in U.S. intervention. You can pick up a rudimentary walking-tour map from the cruise terminal to help you find interesting sights along the way. **Church Street,** which leads right to the fort, has lots of quaint 18th- and 19th-century architecture, as well as several 19th-century cathedrals and the island's Houses of Parliament.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

You can take a taxi up Richmond Hill to **Fort Frederick,** which the French began in 1779. The British retook the island in 1783 and completed the fort in 1791. From its battlements, you'll have a panoramic view of the harbor and the yacht marina.

Don't miss the mountains northeast of St. George's. If you don't have much time, 15m (49-ft.) **Annandale Falls** is just a 15-minute drive away, on the outskirts of the **Grand Etang Forest Reserve.** The overall beauty is almost Tahitian. You can swim and picnic while surrounded by liana vines, elephant ears, and other tropical flora and spices. If you've got more time and want a less crowded spot, the even better **Seven Sisters Waterfalls** are farther into Grand Etang, an approximately 30-minute drive, and then a mile hike along a muddy trail. It's well worth the trip—you'll really get a feel for the power and beauty of the tropical forest here. The falls themselves are lovely, and you can climb to the top and jump off into the pool below.

If you have time, head to **Levera National Park,** in the north of the island, for hikes through a mangrove swamp and a bird sanctuary. Just to the south, the 1912 **Morne Fendue Plantation House,** at St. Patrick's (✆ **473/442-9330**), gives you a chance to enjoy old-time island recipes while dining like an upper-class family in the 1920s. It serves a fixed-price ($20) lunch Monday through Saturday from noon to 4pm; call for reservations.

BEACHES

Grenada's **Grand Anse Beach,** with its 3km (2 miles) of wide sugar-white sands, is one of the best in the Caribbean, boasting calm waters and a great view of St. George's.

There are several restaurants beachside, and you can also join a banana-boat ride or rent a Sunfish sailboat.

SHOPPING

Grenada is no grand Caribbean merchandise mart, so if you're cruising on to such islands as Aruba, St. Martin, or St. Thomas, you might want to postpone serious purchases until then. On the other hand, you can find some fine local handicrafts, gifts, and art here. The best buy is, of course, fresh **spices** and related items. **Nutmeg products** are especially popular. The Grenadians use every part of the nutmeg: They make the outer fruit into a tasty liqueur and a rich jam, and ground the orange membrane around the nut into a different spice called mace. You'll also see the outer shells used as gravel to cover trails and parking lots.

14 Jamaica

A favorite of North American honeymooners, Jamaica is the third-largest of the Caribbean islands after Cuba and Hispaniola, with dense jungle in its interior, mountains rising as high as 2,220m (7,282 ft.), and many beautiful white-sand beaches along its northern coast, where the cruise ships dock. Most head for **Ocho Rios,** although more and more are opting to call at the city of **Montego Bay** ("Mo Bay"), 108km (67 miles) to the west. These ports have comparable attractions, shore excursions, and shopping possibilities.

One of the most densely populated nations in the Caribbean, with a vivid sense of its own identity, Jamaica has a history rooted in the plantation economy and some of the most impassioned politics in the Western Hemisphere, resulting in a sometimes-turbulent day-to-day reality. You've probably heard, for instance, that the island's vendors and hawkers can be pushy and the locals not always the most welcoming to tourists. While there's some truth to this, we've had nothing but positive experiences, so keep an open mind. The island is also the birthplace of Robert Nesta Marley, who was born in 1945 to a 50-year-old British naval officer and his 18-year-old Jamaican wife. With its themes of love, freedom, and global unity, Bob Marley's reggae music has inspired generations of musicians and music lovers. In 1981, Bob Marley died of cancer and was laid to rest in a mausoleum in Nine Mile, the town of his birth.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY The official language is **English,** but most Jamaicans speak a richly nuanced patois. The unit of currency is the **Jamaican dollar** (J$70 = US$1; J$1 = US1¢). Visitors can pay in U.S. dollars, but should always find out if a price is being quoted in Jamaican or U.S. dollars—though it'll probably be obvious by the huge difference.

SHORE EXCURSIONS FROM BOTH PORTS

Because there's little besides shopping near the docks at either Ocho Rios or Montego Bay, most passengers sign up for shore excursions. The following are usually offered from both ports.

Dunn's River Falls Tour ($72, 4–4½ hr. from Ocho Rios; $105, 7½ hr. from Mo Bay): These falls cascade 180m (590 ft.) to the beach and are the most visited attraction in Jamaica, which means they're hopelessly overcrowded when a lot of cruise ships are in port. Tourists are allowed to climb the falls, and it's a ball to slip and slide your way up with hundreds of others, forming a human chain of sorts. Wear a bathing suit under your clothes, and don't forget your waterproof camera and your aqua-socks. (If

New Port in Town

The capital of the parish of Trelawny, **Falmouth** has the largest collection of intact colonial Georgian architecture in the Caribbean. In its early years, it was one of the busiest ports in Jamaica, hosting up to 30 tall ships on any given day to exchange European goods for rum and sugar. By late 2010, Falmouth will once again be on the map as a port of call for Royal Caribbean's Oasis-class ships, with a terminal and shops designed to complement the local Georgian architecture. Falmouth and nearby attractions are about a 32km (20-mile) drive from Montego Bay and 72km (45 miles) from Ocho Rios.

you do forget, most cruise lines will rent you aqua-socks for an extra $5.) The prettiest part of the falls, known as the Laughing Waters, was used in the James Bond classics *Dr. No* and *Live and Let Die.* This tour usually visits other local attractions as well, with time allocated for shopping.

River Tubing Safari ($86, 3½ hr.): This is one of the best excursions we've ever taken. After a scenic van ride deep into the pristine jungles, the group of 20 or so passengers and a couple of guides sit back into big black inner tubes (they have wooden boards covering the bottom so your butt doesn't get scraped on the rocks) and glide a few miles downriver, passing gorgeous, towering bamboo trees and other lush foliage. It's sometimes peaceful and sometimes exhilarating—especially when you hit the rapids! If you're docking in Ocho Rios, this tour is usually on the White River; if in Montego Bay, it's on the Great River. ***Note:*** We find this trip much more interesting than the popular **Martha Brae River Rafting,** which takes you down the river on two-seat bamboo rafts. The cost is about the same.

Horseback-Riding Excursion ($89, 3–3½ hr.): Riders will love this trip: After a 45-minute ride from the stables through fields, you'll gallop along the beach and take your horse bareback into the surf for a thrilling ride.

OCHO RIOS

Once a small banana and fishing port, Ocho Rios is now Jamaica's cruise ship capital, welcoming a couple of ships every day during high season. Though the area has some of the Caribbean's most fabled resorts, and Dunn's River Falls is just a 5-minute taxi ride away, the town itself is not much to see, despite a few outdoor local markets within walking distance. Don't expect to shop in the markets without a lot of hassle and pushy hawking of merchandise—some of which is likely to be "ganja" (the wacky weed). In recent years, an army of blue-uniformed "resort patrol" officers on bikes has been helping to keep order.

COMING ASHORE Most cruise ships dock at the **Ocho Rios Cruise Terminal,** near Dunn's River Falls and adjacent to Island Village and several shopping and eating spots. The normal docking area has space for three ships; megaships occasionally use the adjacent industrial pier, which is a short walk from the terminal. Additional vessels must anchor and tender passengers for the short 15- to 20-minute trip to the terminal.

GETTING AROUND It's about a 5-minute walk to the shopping area, but otherwise **taxis** are your best means of getting around on your own. They'll be waiting for

Rastafarians: the Real McCoys and the Wannabes

Rastafarianism emerged in the 1930s as part of Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa" movement. Spurred by class and racial discrimination, Garvey, a journalist, orator, publisher, and Jamaican national hero, encouraged blacks to take pride in their heritage and worked to promote social, political, and economic liberation. Rastafarians viewed Marcus Garvey as a prophet and were influenced by his teachings to reclaim their African culture. Today, Rastas embrace a doctrine of racial unity and world peace; Rastas neither drink alcohol nor smoke cigarettes, and many are vegetarians. They use a wide variety of herbs for health and as medicine, including ganja, which they consider the "herb of life" and smoke during rituals as a way of getting closer to God. Unfortunately, some locals have adopted the dreadlocks hairstyle and outer appearance of Rastas, but not their inner spirituality. If such characters try to sell you some "herb of life," tell them thanks, but you just took communion.

you at the pier. Those licensed by the government display *JTB* decals, indicating they're official Jamaica Tourist Board taxis. Fixed rates are posted.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

In addition to the excursions from both Jamaican ports (see "Shore Excursions from Both Ports," above), tours to several nearby attractions are also offered from Ocho Rios.

Prospect Plantation & Dunn's River Falls ($82, 4 hr.): About 5km (3 miles) east of town, Prospect Plantation provides a taste of Jamaica's colonial days (sans slavery), with a tractor-drawn jitney driving through fields of seasonal crops such as bananas, sugar cane, coffee, pineapple, and papaya. The trip includes a stop at Dunn's River Falls (see above).

Coyaba River Garden & Dunn's River Falls ($54, 3½ hr.): About 1.6km (1 mile) from town, Coyaba River Garden and Museum was built on the grounds of the former Shaw Park plantation. The museum displays artifacts from the Arawak, Spanish, and English settlements in the area, while the gardens are filled with native flora, a cut-stone courtyard, and fountains. Like many of the other tours in Ocho Rios, it hits Dunn's River Falls on the way back.

Mountain Biking to Chukka Cove ($68, 4 hr.): A minivan takes you into the mountains above St. Ann, where you hop on a bike to ride along back roads, through meadows and woodlands, to picturesque Chukka Cove, where you can take a swim.

Dolphin Cove ($59–$89, 2 hr.): Various excursions to this beachfront site allow you to look at the resident dolphins, or even touch or swim with them. For $10 more, you can add on 1½ hours at (you guessed it) Dunn's River Falls.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHING WALKING DISTANCE

Adjacent to the cruise pier, **Island Village** (www.islandjamaica.com) is a 1.6-hectare (4-acre) entertainment-and-shopping complex developed by Island Records' Chris Blackwell. Attractions include the ReggaeXplosion museum, a museum of Jamaican art, a casino, an outdoor concert venue and indoor theater, a beach with watersports, shopping (lots of it), and a branch of Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

South of Ocho Rios, **Fern Gully** was originally a riverbed. Today, the main A3 road winds through a rainforest filled with wild ferns, hardwood trees, and lianas. For the botanist, there are hundreds of varieties of ferns; for the less plant-minded, roadside stands sell fruits and vegetables, carved-wood souvenirs, and basketwork. The road runs for about 6.4km (4 miles).

The 1817 **Brimmer Hall Estate,** Port Maria, St. Mary's (✆ **876/994-2309**), 34km (21 miles) east of Ocho Rios, is a working plantation where you're driven around in a tractor-drawn jitney to see the tropical fruit trees and coffee plants. Knowledgeable guides tell you about the processes necessary to produce the fine fruits of the island. Afterward, you can relax beside the pool and sample a wide variety of drinks, including an interesting one called "Wow!" The Plantation Tour Eating House serves typical Jamaican dishes for lunch. Tours run weekdays if there are enough people, so call ahead. Admission is $18. In the same general area, toward the coast, at Grants Pen above Oracabessa, **Firefly** (✆ **876/725-0920**) was the home of Sir Noël Coward and his longtime companion, Graham Payn, who, as executor of Coward's estate, donated it to the Jamaica National Heritage Trust. The house has been restored to its condition on the day Sir Noël died in 1973. It's open Monday through Saturday from 9am to 5pm. Admission is $10.

BEACHES

The **Sunset Jamaica Grande Resort,** on Main Street (✆ **876/974-2201**), has two beaches, shared by hotel guests and cruise ship passengers. The beaches, situated at the North and South Towers, can sometimes get jampacked. You might also want to check out the big **James Bond Beach,** in Oracabessa, about 20 minutes from town. Nearby is Goldeneye, home of Ian Fleming, author of the James Bond series.

SHOPPING

Shopping in Ocho Rios is not as good as in Montego Bay and other ports, but if your money's burning a hole in your pocket, you can wander around the **Ocho Rios Craft Park,** opposite the **Ocean Village Shopping Centre** off Main Street. Some 150 stalls stock hats, handbags, place mats, woodcarvings, and paintings, plus the usual T-shirts and jewelry. The **Island Plaza** shopping complex, right in the heart of town, has paintings by local artists, local handmade crafts (be prepared to do some bargaining), carvings, ceramics, and even kitchenware. At all of these places, prepare yourself for aggressive selling and fierce haggling. Every vendor asks too much for an item at first; it allows leeway to negotiate the price. (Note that some so-called duty-free prices are indeed lower than stateside, but then the Jamaican government hits you with a 16.5% "General Consumption Tax," so figure it in when shopping.)

MONTEGO BAY

Montego Bay has better beaches, shopping, and restaurants than Ocho Rios, as well as some of the best golf courses in the Caribbean. Like Ocho Rios, Mo Bay also has its crime, traffic, and annoyances, but there's much more to see and do here, at least nearby. (There's little of interest in the town itself except shopping.) Getting from place to place is one of the major difficulties, however. Whatever you want to visit seems to be in yet another direction. Shore excursions and taxis are the way to go.

COMING ASHORE Montego Bay has a modern, expanded cruise dock for three to four ships, with a large terminal and the usual duty-free stores, refreshments, phones, tourist information, and taxi/bus stands.

GETTING AROUND If you don't book a shore excursion, **taxis** are the way to get around. They'll be waiting for you at the pier. Those licensed by the government display *JTB* decals, indicating they're official Jamaica Tourist Board taxis. Fixed rates are posted.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

In addition to the excursions from both Jamaica ports (see "Shore Excursions from Both Ports," earlier), Mo Bay offers tours to several interesting plantations and great houses.

Rose Hall Great House ($55, 3 hr.): This is the most famous plantation home in Jamaica. Built about 2 centuries ago by John Palmer, it gained notoriety from the doings of "Infamous Annie" Palmer, wife of the builder's grandnephew, who supposedly dabbled in witchcraft and took slaves as lovers, killing them when they bored her. Annie was also said to have murdered several of her husbands while they slept, and eventually suffered the same fate herself. For what it's worth, many Jamaicans insist the house is haunted.

Greenwood Great House ($39, 3½ hr.): More interesting to some than Rose Hall, this Georgian-style building was the residence of Richard Barrett, a first cousin of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. On display is the family's library, along with portraits, antiques, and period musical instruments.

Croydon Plantation Tour ($65, 6 hr.): A guided tour of this mountain estate includes a .5km (⅓-mile) walk over gently sloping terrain, with many great views. Stops are made for refreshments and seasonal fresh fruits, and at the end you get a traditional Jamaican-style lunch.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

There are no real attractions within walking distance. If you're not taking a shore excursion, consider a visit to **Rocklands Wildlife Station,** Anchovy, St. James (✆ **876/952-2009**). Lisa Salmon, known as the "Bird Lady of Anchovy," established this sanctuary, which is perfect for nature lovers and bird-watchers. You can feed small doves and finches from your hand, and might even coax a Jamaican doctor bird to perch on your finger and drink syrup. Rocklands is about 1.2km (¾-mile) outside Anchovy on the road from Montego Bay. Admission is $10.

BEACHES

Doctors Cave Beach (✆ **876/952-2566**) on Gloucester Avenue across from the Doctors Cave Beach Hotel (✆ **876/952-4355;** www.doctorscave.com), helped to launch Mo Bay as a resort in the 1940s. Dressing rooms, chairs, umbrellas, and rafts are available.

One of the premier beaches of Jamaica, **Aquasol Theme Park** (formerly Walter Fletcher Beach; www.aquasoljamaica.com) is in the heart of Mo Bay. It's noted for tranquil waters, so it's a particular favorite for families with children. Changing rooms are available, and lifeguards are on duty. Nearby, the **Pork Pit,** 27 Gloucester Ave. (✆ **876/952-1046**), is the best place for the famous Jamaican jerk pork and jerk chicken. Many beachgoers come over here for a big lunch. Picnic tables encircle the building, and everything is open air and informal. Order half a pound of jerk meat with a baked yam or baked potato and a bottle of Red Stripe beer. Prices are very reasonable; lunch will cost $10.

Montego Bay Golf Excursions

Montego Bay provides a number of excellent golf opportunities. Various cruise lines offer organized excursions, but you can also arrange play ahead of time on your own, and then taxi to the course.

- **Tryall Club** (✆ **876/956-5660;** www.tryallclub.com), 19km (12 miles) from Montego Bay, is an excellent, regal 18-hole, par-72 course that's often been the site of major golf tournaments, including the Jamaica Classic Annual and the Johnnie Walker Tournament. Greens fees are about $125, plus $30 for a cart.
- **Rose Hall Resort & Country Club,** at Rose Hall (✆ **876/953-2650;** www.rosehallresort.com), has a noted 18-hole, par-71 course with an unusual and challenging seaside and mountain layout, designed by Robert Von Hagge. The 90m-high (295-ft.) 13th tee affords a rare panoramic view of the sea, and the 15th green is next to a 12m-high (39-ft.) waterfall, once featured in a James Bond movie. Amenities include a fully stocked pro shop, a clubhouse, and a professional staff. Greens fees are $169.
- **Half Moon Resort,** at Rose Hall (✆ **876/953-2211;** www.halfmoongolf.com), features an 18-hole, par-72 championship course designed by Robert Trent Jones, Sr. Greens fees are about $130 to $150, plus $25 for a mandatory caddy.
- **Ironshore Golf & Country Club,** Ironshore, St. James, Montego Bay (✆ **876/953-3681**), a well-known 18-hole, par-72 course, is privately owned, but open to the public. Greens fees are about $40, cart included, and $16 for a mandatory caddy (for 18 holes).

On the main road, 18km (11 miles) east of Montego Bay, the .75km (½-mile) **Rose Hall Beach Club** has a secure and secluded, white sandy beach with crystal-clear water; a full restaurant, along with two beach bars and a covered pavilion; an open-air dance area; showers, restrooms, and changing facilities; plus beach volleyball courts, various beach games, live music, and a full watersports activities program.

Note: All of these beaches charge admission, which runs about $8 for adults.

SHOPPING

The main shopping areas are at: **Montego Freeport,** within easy walking distance of the pier; **City Centre,** with most of the duty-free shops, aside from those at the large hotels; and **Holiday Village Shopping Centre,** across from the Holiday Inn on Rose Hall Road, heading toward Ocho Rios.

The **Old Fort Craft Market,** a shopping complex with nearly 200 vendors licensed by the Jamaica Tourist Board, fronts Howard Cooke Boulevard up from Gloucester Avenue in the heart of Montego Bay, on the site of Fort Montego. With a varied assortment of handicrafts, this is browsing country. You'll see wall hangings, hand-woven straw items, and handcarved wood sculptures, and you can also get your hair braided. Vendors can be extremely aggressive, so be prepared for some major hassles, as well as serious negotiation. Persistent bargaining on your part will lead to substantial discounts.

You can find the best selection of handmade Jamaican souvenirs at the **Crafts Market,** near Harbour Street in downtown Montego Bay. Straw hats and bags, wooden platters, straw baskets, musical instruments, beads, carved objects, and toys are all sold here. That "jipijapa" hat will come in handy if you'll be out in the intense island sun.

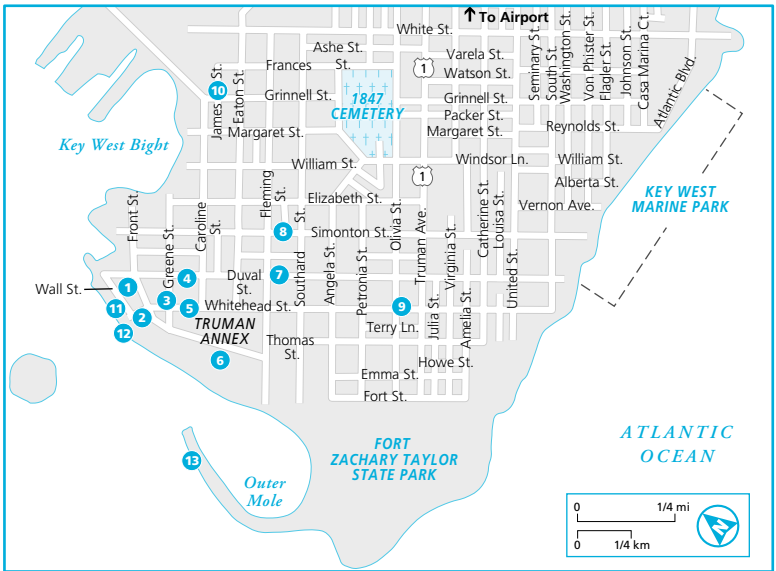
15 Key West

Located at the end of the Florida Keys, Key West is America's southernmost city and has the vibe of a colorful Caribbean outpost with a dash of New Orleans high life. It's a fun-loving, heavy-drinking town with a lot of history, more than a little touristy goofiness, a thousand Hemingway look-alikes, and a large gay community. It's a regular melting pot. It's also, as many tour guides like to point out, the Pulitzer Prize–winner capital of the U.S., with more winners per capita than anywhere else. Because most attractions are in good proximity to the cruise docks, there's little sense in taking an excursion here unless you have mobility problems. Wander around touristy Mallory Square and Duval Street, check out some of the theme bars, and then take a walk down some of the quieter side streets, maybe visiting Truman's Little White House or the Hemingway Home & Museum. Or, you might want to spend your day playing golf, diving, or snorkeling. Several "raw bars" near the dock area serve seafood, including oysters and clams, although the king here is conch—grilled, ground into burgers, made into chowder, fried in batter as fritters, or served raw in a conch salad (though beware, some of the quickie conch vendors near the docks are pretty skimpy with the conch . . . can we say dough balls?). If you have more of a sweet tooth than anything else, be sure to sample the decadent frozen, chocolate-dipped, Key lime pie on a stick that you can pick up at several places in town.

COMING ASHORE Ships dock at **Mallory Square** (Old Town's tourist central), at the nearby Hilton Resort's **Pier B,** and at the U.S. Navy base's **"Outer Mole" pier.** All are on the Gulf side of the island. Passengers arriving at the Navy pier must take an official shuttle bus the short distance to and from Mallory Square, as individuals are not permitted to transit the base on their own. Additional ships can anchor for the short tender ride to shore.

GETTING AROUND The island is only 4 miles long and 2 miles wide, so getting around is easy. The most popular attractions are within walking distance of Mallory Square. The farthest is Hemingway Home, about a mile down Duval. Many passengers opt for one of the island's tram tours, which are sold as shore excursions, but are also available on a walk-up basis. The **Conch Tour Train** (✆ **305/294-5161;** www.conchtourtrain.com) is a narrated 90-minute tour with commentary on 100 local sites. The depot is at Mallory Square, and trains depart every 30 minutes ($29 adults, $14 children 4–12). The trip has only one stop where passengers can get on and off (at the Historic Seaport). If you want more flexibility, try the **Old Town Trolley** (✆ **305/296-6688;** www.trolleytours.com), which allows you to hop on and off its trains to explore on your own. Prices are the same as the Conch Train, and pickup stops are signposted around town. If you want wheels of your own, **bicycles** and **motor scooters** are a good bet here and are widely available, with daily rates hovering around $15 and $35, respectively.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY The official language is **English.** The unit of currency is the **U.S. dollar.**



CRUISE TERMINAL 11,12 & 13

ATTRACTIONS

Audubon House and Tropical Garden **5**
Captain Tony's Saloon **3**
Finnegan's Wake **10**
Harry S. Truman Little White House **6**
Hemingway Home **9**
Heritage House Museum/Robert Frost Cottage **5**
Hog's Breath Saloon **1**
Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville **7**
Key West Aquarium **2**
Mallory Square **1**
Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Museum **5**
Nancy Forrester's Secret Garden **8**
Sloppy Joe's **4**

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

In addition to the Conch Tour Train described above, most cruise lines offer walking tours and sometimes bike tours for those who like the services of a guide. But this is really a port to explore on your own.

Key West Catamaran Sail & Snorkel Tour ($50, 3–3½ hr.): The popular *Fury* catamarans take passengers to a reef for some snorkeling, and then finish the trip back to shore with music, booze, and a good time.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

All attractions in Key West are within walking distance, though the Hemingway Home and Nancy Forrester's Secret Garden are at least 20 minutes from Mallory Square.

Bars—large, packed theme bars, usually with someone playing guitar and singing the hits in one corner—are a big draw in Key West. **Captain Tony's Saloon,** 428 Greene St. (✆ **305/294-1838**), is the oldest active bar in Florida, and is both heavily patronized by cruise ship passengers and tacky as hell. The 1851 building was the original Sloppy Joe's, a rough-and-tumble fishermen's saloon. Hemingway drank here from 1933 to 1937; Jimmy Buffett got his start here before opening his own bar and going on to fame and fortune. The current **Sloppy Joe's,** 201 Duval St. (✆ **305/294-5717**),

Deep-Sea Fishing in Key West

As Hemingway, an avid fisherman, would attest, the waters off the Florida Keys are some of the world's finest fishing grounds. You can follow in Papa's wake aboard the 40-foot ***Linda D IV*** and ***Linda D V*** (✆ **800/299-9798** or 305/296-9798; www.charterboatlindad.com), which offer the best deep-sea fishing here. Full-day charters for up to six people cost $950; a half-day charter is $600. Full-day shared charters are $225 per person; a half-day is $150. Make arrangements as far in advance as possible.

is the most touristy bar in Key West, visited by almost all cruise ship passengers—even those who don't normally go to bars. It aggressively plays up its association with Hemingway, with pictures of Hemingway lookalike contest winners plastered all over the walls. **Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville,** 500 Duval St. (✆ **305/296-3070**), is kind of a refugee from Branson, Missouri, but if you've got a hankering for a cheeseburger from paradise or want to waste away again on margaritas, this is your place. Much less commercial is the open-air **Hog's Breath Saloon,** 400 Front St. (✆ **305/296-4222**), near the cruise docks. Raucous and loud, it's populated by visiting fishermen and bikers alike, all of them with a drink in hand. Meanwhile, the local sailors and fishermen head over to **Finnegan's Wake,** 320 Grinnell St. (✆ **305/293-0222**), a truly authentic Irish pub with an extensive and creative food menu.

Wherever you end up, try some of the favorite local beer, Hog's Breath, or some of the favorite local rum, Key West Gold (even though it's a cheat—it isn't actually made on the island). Most places recommended sell fast food to go with their drinks.

There's a bar at the **Harry S. Truman Little White House,** 111 Front St. (✆ **305/294-9911;** www.trumanlittlewhitehouse.com), too, in the back room where Truman and his friends played poker—though visitors can't drink there. The house, formerly the home of the Navy base commander, served as Truman's vacation home during his presidency and today remains just as he left it, decorated in late-1940s style. By the time the guides finish their well-organized 1-hour tour, you'll feel as if you've gone back in time. Admission is $15 for adults, $5 for kids; tours run daily every 15 minutes from 9:30am till 4pm.

The **Hemingway Home,** 907 Whitehead St. (✆ **305/294-1136;** www.hemingwayhome.com), provides a similar if less formal look back at the island's old days. "Papa" lived here with his second wife, Pauline, completing *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *A Farewell to Arms* in the studio annex out back. Hemingway had some 60 polydactyl (many-toed) cats, whose descendants still live on the grounds. Admission costs $12 for adults and $6 for kids.

The **Audubon House and Tropical Garden,** 205 Whitehead St., at Greene Street (✆ **877/294-2470** or 305/294-2116; www.audubonhouse.com), is dedicated to the 1832 Key West sojourn of the famous naturalist John James Audubon. The ornithologist didn't live in this three-story building, but it's filled with his engravings. The main reason to visit is to see how wealthy sailors lived in Key West in the 19th century, and to admire the lush tropical gardens surrounding the house. Admission is $10 for adults and $5 for kids.

The **Key West Heritage House Museum and Robert Frost Cottage,** 410 Caroline St. (✆ **305/296-3573;** www.heritagehousemuseum.org), was the home of Jessie

Porter Newton, the grande dame of Key West. Today, it's filled with mementos of the illustrious guests who partook of her hospitality, including Tennessee Williams, Gloria Swanson, and Robert Frost, who stayed in a cottage out back. Admission is $5 for adults, $1 for kids; closed Sunday.

On the waterfront at Mallory Square, the **Key West Aquarium,** 1 Whitehead St. (✆ **800/868-7482;** www.keywestaquarium.com), in operation since 1932, was the first tourist attraction built in the Florida Keys. The aquarium's special feature is a touch tank where you can feel a sea urchin, a sea star, or a conch, the town's mascot and symbol. Admission is $12 for adults, $5 for kids.

Near the docks, the **Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Museum,** 200 Greene St. (✆ **305/294-2633;** www.melfisher.org), contains some of the more than $400 million in gold jewelry, doubloons, and other artifacts the late treasure hunter Mel Fisher plucked from the Spanish galleon *Nuestra Señora de Atocha,* which sunk off the Keys in 1622. Educational exhibits explain salvage operations and the history of the Spanish and piracy in the islands. Admission is $12 for adults and $6 for children.

Nancy Forrester's Secret Garden, 1 Free School Lane, off Simonton between Southard and Fleming streets (✆ **305/294-0015;** www.nfsgarden.com), is the most lavish and verdant garden in town, with some 150 species of palms and thousands of orchids, climbing vines, and ground covers. Admission is $6; open daily 10am to 5pm.

BEACHES

Beaches are not too compelling here, but the best and closest to the cruise docks is **Fort Zachary Taylor State Beach** (✆ **305/292-6713**), a 12-minute walk away. To get here, go through the gates leading into the Truman Annex (site of the Little White House).

SHOPPING

Within a 12-block radius of **Mallory Square,** you'll see mostly tawdry, overpriced tourist merchandise, but if you're in the market for some Key West kitsch, you'll find flamingo snow globes, floppy straw hats, seashell ashtrays, and the like. At Mallory itself, shops sell seashells from the seashore—actually, from around the world, including some you'd hardly believe are real. They also sell wine-bottle holders shaped like lobsters, but what the hell. As you move farther along **Duval Street** from Mallory, you'll notice that the shops get more and more stylish. Could it be a coincidence that this part of town is the center of Key West's gay community? We don't think so.

16 Martinique

Fairy-tale romance and horrific disaster: Who could resist such an enticing combination? Martinique was the birthplace and childhood home of Empress Joséphine, sweetheart and wife of Napoleon; as if that weren't enough to entice you, consider the epic tragedy that befell St. Pierre one fair day in 1902 when it was a bustling cosmopolitan capital one minute, then a devastated volcanic graveyard of 30,000 souls the next. Love and death make quite a one-two punch, but they're just the hook. Look a bit deeper to appreciate Martinique's subtler attractions—quaint seaside villages, colonial ruins dating from when France and England vied for the island, and captivatingly beautiful rainforests and beaches. In 1946, Martinique became an overseas department of France, which it remains today.

COMING ASHORE Most cruise ships dock in the heart of Fort-de-France, at the **Pointe Simon Cruise Dock,** which has quays for two mid- to large-size vessels. Because Martinique is a popular port of call, one megaship, or two smaller vessels, may also wind up docking at the **Tourelles Passenger Terminal** at the main harbor, a 5-minute cab ride from Fort-de-France. Expansion of the Pointe Simon area is underway, including new hotels, restaurants, and construction to allow additional berthing for the megaships. When all cruise piers are full, additional ships can dock across from the Tourelles terminal at a commercial pier, about a 5-minute shuttle ride from Tourelles.

GETTING AROUND Travel by **taxi** is convenient, but expensive. Most cabs are metered; you'll find them waiting at the cruise pier. To cross the bay to La Pagerie (Empress Joséphine's birthplace) and the resort area of Pointe du Bout, take one of the blue **ferries** that sail from east of the cruise dock in Fort-de-France at least once per hour. Round-trip tickets cost about $7 per person. Avis, Budget, and Hertz all have **rental cars,** too.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **French** is Martinique's official language, but you can get by with **English** at most restaurants and tourist sights. Martinique is an overseas region of France, so the **euro** (€) is the official currency (.75€ = US$1; 1€ = US$1.33). U.S. dollars are commonly accepted in tourist areas.

CALLING FROM THE U.S. When calling Martinique from the U.S., dial the international access code **(011)** and the country code **(596)** before the numbers listed in this section. The numbers listed here already begin with 596, but an effort by the French telephone authorities to standardize procedures requires that you dial those three digits twice.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Rainforest & Plantations 4WD Safari ($109, 4–5 hr.): Take your off-road vehicle through tropical forests and sugar cane plantations (stopping to sample the crop) to a banana plantation and a distillery, where you'll do short tours.

Martinique Snorkeling ($64, 3 hr.): Across the bay from Fort-de-France, the reef at Anse Dufour has excellent snorkeling for experts and novices. The reef is filled with marine animals, including French grunts, blackbar soldierfish, and silversides. Snorkeling equipment is provided, along with professional instruction, supervision, and transportation.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Fort-de-France is a bustling town of 100,000 residents, full of ochre buildings, ornate wrought-iron balconies, cascading flowers, and tall palm trees. The town's narrow streets, cluttered with boutiques and cafes, climb from the bowl of the sea to the surrounding hills, forming a great urban amphitheater. There's plenty here to keep you busy.

At the eastern end of downtown, **La Savane** is a broad formal park with palms, mangoes, and manicured lawns, perfect for a promenade or rest in the shade. Its most famous feature is the **Statue of Empress Joséphine,** carved in 1858 by Vital Dubray. Expect her to be headless: Napoleon's Little Creole was unceremoniously decapitated in 1995 in commemoration of her role in reinstating slavery on the island in the early 1800s. Across the street, **Bibliothèque Schoelcher** (**Schoelcher Library; ✆ 596/70-26-67**) is one of Fort-de-France's great Belle Epoque buildings. Named in honor

of Victor Schoelcher, one of France's most influential abolitionists, this elaborate structure, designed by French architect Henri Pick, was first displayed at the 1889 Paris Exposition. Four years later, it was dismantled and shipped across the Atlantic. Today, it houses Schoelcher's books as well as an impressive archive of colonization, slavery, and emancipation documents. Admission is free; closed Sunday.

Another Henri Pick masterpiece, **St. Louis Cathedral,** on rue Victor Schoelcher at rue Blénac, was built in 1895. A contemporary of Gustave Eiffel (of Eiffel Tower fame), Pick used massive iron beams to support the walls, ceiling, and spire. A grand example of Industrial Revolution architecture, it's been likened to a Catholic railway station. The organ, stained-glass windows, and ornamented interior walls are well worth a look and can be viewed every morning except Saturday.

Built in 1640, **Fort St. Louis,** boulevard Alfassa, dominates the rocky promontory east of La Savane. A noteworthy example of 17th- and 18th-century military architecture, it first was used to defend Fort-de-France in 1674 against Dutch invaders. Today, the bastion remains the French navy's headquarters in the Caribbean and is open to visitors only on special occasions.

The best of Fort-de-France's many museums, the **Musée Départemental d'Archéologie Précolombienne Préhistoire,** 9 rue de la Liberté (✆ **596/71-57-05**), traces 2,000 years of Martinique's pre-Columbian past with more than a thousand relics from the Arawak and Carib cultures. Admission is about $5 for adults; closed Sunday.

You can expect to find great food all over town if you want to stop for lunch. More than any other island in the French West Indies, Martinique gives French and Creole cuisine equal billing.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

Martinique is much too large to tackle in a single day. You'll have to make some tough choices about which of its many museums, plantations, floral parks, and natural wonders to visit. Here are two suggested itineraries for the day.

NORTH OF FORT-DE-FRANCE Martinique's Carib name, Madiana, means "island of flowers." To see what the Caribs were talking about, stroll through the **Jardin de Balata** (✆ **596/64-48-73;** www.jardindebalata.fr). Located about 8km (5 miles) north of town, this lush, Edenic garden showcases 200 species of plants, trees, and tropical flowers, as well as resident hummingbirds, frogs, and lizards. Admission is about $8.

Yes, it's hot outside, but things could be worse. One of Martinique's must-see attractions, the village of **St. Pierre** on the northwest coast was the cultural and economic capital of the island until 8am on May 8, 1902, when the **Mount Pelée** volcano exploded in fire and lava. Three minutes later, all but two of St. Pierre's 30,000 inhabitants had been incinerated, buried in ash and lava, or asphyxiated by poisonous gas. The town once hailed as the "Paris of the Antilles" became the "Pompeii of the Caribbean," and today it's no more than a sleepy fishing village, home to fewer than 5,000. Ruins of a church, theater, and other buildings punctuate the town, memorials to St. Pierre's former glory. The one-room **Musée Volcanologique,** rue Victor Hugo (✆ **596/78-15-16**), traces the story of the cataclysm through pictures and relics excavated from the debris. Admission is about $2. In lieu of walking from one ruin to another, you can hop on the Cyparis Express trolley from here for an hour-long tour (tickets about $11). The trolley is named in honor of Cyparis, a prisoner locked

behind thick cell walls, who was one of the survivors of the eruption. He later toured with P. T. Barnum's circus, showing off his burn scars.

Part sugar-plantation ruins, part tropical paradise, **Habitation Céron** (✆ **596/52-94-53**) is the most evocative of Martinique's historical agricultural sites. This sprawling 17th-century estate, 15 minutes north of St. Pierre, is almost as wild and tranquil as the surrounding rainforest, but its verdigris cisterns, moss-covered stone buildings, and archaic, still functioning water mill are all haunted with the ghosts of a time when sugar was king, slaves toiled in the heat, and French colonists lived in languid comfort. Admission is about $8.

A few miles south of St. Pierre, **Le Carbet** is where Columbus landed in 1502, the first French settlers arrived in 1635, and the French painter Paul Gauguin lived for 5 months in 1887. The unassuming **Musée Paul Gauguin,** Anse Turin (✆ **596/78-22-66**), sits not far from the hut once occupied by the painter. It has no original paintings, but you will see biographical texts and whiny, self-pitying letters he wrote to his wife back in France. Admission is about $5.

SOUTH OF FORT-DE-FRANCE Marie Josèphe Rose Tascher de la Pagerie was born in 1763 in the quaint little village of **Trois Ilets,** across the bay from Fort-de-France. As Joséphine, she became the wife of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1796 and empress of France in 1804. A small museum, the **Musée de la Pagerie** (✆ **596/68-34-55**), sits in the former estate kitchen building, where Joséphine gossiped with her slaves. Displays include the bed that she slept in until she departed for France at age 16; portraits of her and of Napoleon; invitations to Parisian balls; and several letters, including a passionate missive from lovelorn Napoleon. Admission costs about $7; closed Monday.

You'll have passed through a number of quaint coastal villages by this time, but none sweeter than **Ste. Luce.** Absurdly picturesque with its blindingly white stucco walls, red-tile roofs, turquoise sea, and multicolored fishing boats, this town is pure sun-drenched maritime serenity. Swim or snorkel off the small, pleasant beach; meditate on horizon-dominating Diamond Rock (a former British citadel); or check out the village boutiques and cafes. For an unhurried taste of French island life, it's as good a place as any to spend the day.

BEACHES

Serious beach bunnies hop south of Fort-de-France to **Grand Anse des Salines,** widely regarded as Martinique's nicest strand. At the island's extreme southern tip, about an hour from the capital by car, it has coconut palm trees, views of Diamond Rock, and white sand that seems to go on for miles. Beachside stands provide refreshments. To get to the island's main **gay beach,** turn right at the entrance to Grand Anse des Salines and drive to the far end of the parking lot, near the sign for Petite Anse des Salines. Follow the path through the woods and then veer left till you find the quiet section with the good-looking guys.

Conveniently across the bay from Fort-de-France, **Pointe du Bout** is Martinique's most lavish resort area. Aside from a marina and a variety of watersports, the area has some modest man-made, white-sand beaches. The sandy, natural beaches at nearby **Anse Mitan** and **Anses d'Arlet** are popular with both swimmers and snorkelers.

Beaches north of Fort-de-France have mostly gray (they like to call it silver) volcanic sand. The best of the bunch is **Anse Turin,** just to the side of the main Caribbean coastal road, between St. Pierre and Le Carbet. Extremely popular with locals and shaded by palms, it's where Gauguin swam when he called the island home.

Martinique Golf Excursions

When Robert Trent Jones, Sr., designed **Golf de la Martinique** (✆ **596/68-32-81;** www.golfmartinique.com) in 1976, he chose a picturesque, historic site: the seaside hills neighboring La Pagerie, the birthplace of Empress Joséphine. Just 32 kilometers (20 miles) from Fort-de-France, this good, tough, 18-hole, 6,640-yard, par-71 course features emerald hills, swaying palms, constant vistas of the turquoise sea, and, thankfully, year-round trade winds that help keep things cool. The par-5 12th hole, with a dogleg to the right, is the most difficult hole. The fairway here is narrow, the green is long, and the wind, especially between December and April, is tricky. The 15th and 16th require shots over sea inlets. Facilities include a pro shop, a golf academy, a bar, a restaurant, and tennis courts. English-speaking pros are at your service. Greens fees and cart rental run about $105 for 18 holes, about $80 for 9 holes. A set of clubs is another $20. Some cruise lines offer organized excursions to the club.

Martinique has no legal nudist beaches, but toplessness is as common here as anywhere in France. As a rule, public beaches lack changing cabins or showers, but hotel lockers and changing cabanas can be used by nonguests for a charge.

SHOPPING

Martinique has a good selection of French luxury items—perfumes, fashionable clothing, luggage, crystal, and dinnerware—at prices that can be as much as 30% to 40% lower than those in the United States. Unfortunately, because some luxury goods, including jewelry, are subject to a hefty value-added tax, the savings are ultimately less compelling. Paying in dollar-denominated traveler's checks or credit cards is sometimes good for a 20% discount.

The main shopping district in Fort-de-France is bound by rue Ernest Deproge (on the waterfront), La Savane, rue Lamartine, and rue de la République, with **rue Victor Hugo** being the single most important stretch. Local goods, such as the excellent island rum, Creole jewelry, madras fabric, folk paintings, and hand-woven baskets and straw hats, are good buys and representative of the island. The **open-air market** in La Savane, at rue de la Liberté and rue Ernest Deproge, has the best selection of these items.

17 Nevis

Off the beaten tourist track, south of St. Martin and north of Guadeloupe, Nevis is the junior partner in the combined Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis, which gained self-government from Britain in 1967 and became a totally independent nation in 1983. Though smaller than St. Kitts and lacking a major historical site like that island's Brimstone Hill Fortress, Nevis is nevertheless the more appealing and upbeat of the two islands. Columbus first sighted the island in 1493, naming it Las Nieves, Spanish for "snows," because its 970m (3,182-ft.) mountain reminded him of the Pyrenees. Settled by the British in 1628, Nevis became a prosperous sugar-growing island as well as the most popular spa island of the 18th century, when people flocked

in from other West Indian islands to visit its hot mineral springs. Nevis's two most famous historical residents were Admiral Horatio Nelson, who married a local woman here in 1787, and Alexander Hamilton, who was born here and went on to find fame as a drafter of the American Federalist Papers, as George Washington's treasury secretary, and as Aaron Burr's unfortunate dueling partner. Today, the island's capital city, **Charlestown,** has a lovely mixture of port-town exuberance and small-town charm, and the popular **Pinney's Beach** is just a knockout.

COMING ASHORE Only small ships can dock at the **Charlestown Port,** right in the center of Charlestown. Larger vessels must anchor off the coast of **Pinney's Beach.** The small cruise terminal has restrooms and a bar, but the main street is just a few steps away and is where you'll find eats, shops, and taxis.

GETTING AROUND The entirety of Charlestown is accessible on foot, but if you want to visit Pinney's Beach or elsewhere on the island, you can get a **taxi** from Charlestown. The cost to Pinney's is about $7. Taxis also give island tours; just negotiate a price with your driver.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **English** is the language of both St. Kitts and Nevis. The local currency is the **Eastern Caribbean dollar** (EC$2.71 = US$1; EC$1 = US37¢), though most shops and restaurants quote prices in U.S. dollars. Always determine which currency locals are talking about before making a purchase.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Some of the small-ship lines offer a day at Pinney's Beach as part of their regular visit, along with hiking and snorkeling options, but Nevis is so small and easy to negotiate on your own that excursions are neither necessary nor advised.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

If your ship docks in Charlestown, you're at dead center of a perfect walking-tour opportunity. Charlestown is a lovely little place, laid back in somewhat the same manner as St. John, but with some of the rural character of sister island St. Kitts.

If you head left from the docks and walk a little ways (around .4km/¼-mile) along Main Street, you'll come to the **Museum of Nevis History at the Birthplace of Alexander Hamilton** (✆ **869/469-5786;** www.nevis-nhcs.org/nevishistory.html), where the road curves just before the turnoff to Island Road. It's a rustic little two-level house set right on the coastline. On the first floor is the small **Museum of Nevis History** and gift shop (admission $5; Mon–Fri 9am–4pm, Sat 9am–noon).

Backtracking along Main Street, you'll pass several serviceable if unremarkable shops. Keep walking through the center of town, saying hi to the occasional passing mama goat and kids, and then turn left onto Government Road. One block up on the left, you'll find the **Jews' Burial Ground,** with graves from 1684 to 1768. When we were there, the dead were being entertained with reggae music drifting over from a shop across the street, while a breeze stirred the few trees on the property. All in all, not a bad resting spot.

Amble back to Main Street, turn left, and continue on past the Grove Park Cricket Ground, bearing left when the road forks. Head up the hill (where you'll see several buildings standing alone on the hill to your right) and then turn at the first right, which will bring you back behind those buildings, the first of which is the inaccessible Government House and the second of which is the **Nelson Museum** (✆ **869/469-5786;** www.nevis-nhcs.org/nelsonmuseum.html). A very small, very homemade,

and very appealing kind of place, it traces the history of Admiral Horatio Nelson's career enforcing England's Navigation Acts in the Caribbean, and also houses artifacts from Nevis's Carib, Arawak, and Aceramic peoples. The timeline of Nelson's Caribbean career is portrayed in ship models, ceramic and bronze Nelson figures, paintings of his battles and other scenes, a scrap from the Union Jack (under which the admiral was standing when he was shot), and more memorabilia. Admission is $5. The museum is closed on Saturday and Sunday but will open for a group by request; otherwise, it's open Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm.

Once back outside, amble slowly off in the same direction you were going (right from the gate). Keep bearing right and you'll eventually be back on Main Street, in plenty of time to do a little shopping or stop at one of the local bars or restaurants.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

The 3.2-hectare (8-acre) **Botanical Garden of Nevis** (✆ **869/469-3399**) is located 5km (3 miles) south of Charlestown on the Montpelier Estate. There are several gardens, including a tropical rainforest conservatory, a rose and vine garden, a cactus garden, a tropical fruit garden, and an orchid garden. Fountains, ponds, and re-creations of Maya sculptures dot the grounds. Admission costs $10; open Monday to Saturday 10am to 4pm and Sunday 11am to 2pm.

The island of Nevis is essentially one big cone, sloping upward on all sides to Nevis Peak in the center. Hiking even halfway up the mountain is a strenuous climb, but pays off with spectacular views and sightings of monkeys, birds, and rare plants. Under no circumstances should you hike this mountain alone; not only is it unsafe, but you'll also miss out on your guide's explanations of the surroundings. **The Herbert Heights Village Experience,** Zetland Village, Gingerland (✆ **869/469-3259;** www.herbertheights.com) takes 2-hour tours on foot or on donkey. The price is $20.

BEACHES

The name to know on Nevis is **Pinney's Beach,** located north of Charlestown. It's a lovely spot for swimming, snorkeling, beachcombing, or just sitting back and watching the pelicans dive-bomb into the surf. It's home to the gorgeous Four Seasons resort and, as a counterpoint to conspicuous luxury, the rickety **Sunshine's Bar and Grill** (✆ **869/469-5817**), which bills itself as "Home of the Killer Bee." Sunshine's sits right on the beach and serves beer and other refreshments along with the aforementioned Bee, a "killer" rum drink. **Oualie Beach,** just north of Pinney's, isn't as popular as its sister to the south, but is no less pristine. Visitors here are protected from rough waves by reefs far out into the bay, so the water is usually safe for small children. Behind the beach sits Oualie Beach Resort, with a restaurant, bar, and live, open-air music for all beachgoers.

SHOPPING

Nevis is no shopping hub. A few uninteresting gift shops dot Main Street. The **Nevis Philatelic Bureau,** at the Head Post Office, on Market Street next to the public market, 1 block south and 1 block east of the docks (✆ **869/469-5535**), has a range of Nevis stamps for collectors.

18 The Panama Canal

The Panama Canal is an awesome feat of engineering and human effort. Construction began in 1880 and wasn't completed until 1914, at the expense of thousands of lives,

and the vast majority of the original structure and equipment is still in use. Transiting the Canal, which links the Atlantic Ocean with the Pacific, is a thrill for anyone even vaguely interested in engineering or history.

Passing completely through the Canal takes about 8 hours from start to finish, and is a fascinating procedure—the route is about 80km (50 miles) long and includes passage through three main locks, which, through gravity alone, raise ships over Central America and down again on the other side. Between the locks, ships pass through artificially created lakes such as the massive Gatun Lake, 26m (85 ft.) above sea level. It often costs ships about $100,000 to pass through, with fees based on each ship's weight. Your ship will line up in the morning, mostly with cargo ships, to await its turn through the Canal. While you're transiting, there will be a running narration of history and facts about the Canal by an expert who's brought on board for the day.

The Canal is so vital to the cruise industry that it has spawned its own word, *panamax,* meaning the maximum size a ship can be and still make it through. Panamax ships, it should be noted, make for a tight fit: Sometimes there are only a couple of feet between the hull and the sides of the lock. Sitting in a lower-deck lounge and watching the walls go by less than an arm's length out the windows is really, really disorienting. That tight-fit experience may soon be a thing of the past, though. In late 2006, Panamanian voters approved a plan to widen and modernize the Panama Canal, digging a new, 60% wider channel that will parallel the existing canal along its narrowest sections on either side of Gatun Lake. Once complete (somewhere around 2014), it will effectively double the Canal's capacity and give cruise lines much greater flexibility in planning the deployment and itineraries of their largest, post-panamax ships.

Cruises that include a **Canal crossing** are generally 10 to 14 nights long, with popular routes running between Florida and Acapulco; they visit a handful of Caribbean and Mexican ports and a few ports in Central America along the way, including Panama's San Blas Islands, Costa Rica's Puerto Caldera, and Guatemala's Puerto Quetzal. Many ships also do a **partial crossing** of the Canal, sailing into Gatun Lake from the Caribbean side, docking to let passengers off for excursions, and then sailing back out again.

COLON

In compliance with a treaty signed between the United States and Panama in 1977, Canal operations passed from U.S. to Panamanian hands at the stroke of midnight on December 31, 1999. Not only did the transition go smoothly, but the changeover also spurred government agencies and private developers in Panama to expand the Canal Zone's tourism infrastructure. This meant not simply trying to attract as many ships as possible, but also developing new attractions at the Canal's Atlantic entrance to lure cruise passengers off their ships and into Panama's interior on shore excursions and for pre- and post-cruise stays. Even ships not transiting the Canal are being wooed, with a long-term goal of making the city of Colón a home port for cruise ships sailing to the southern Caribbean.

The linchpin project in the new developments is **Colón 2000,** a $45-million private port development that opened in October 2000 in Colón, near the Canal's Caribbean entrance, and that is capable of handling any size cruise vessel—even the 100,000-plus-ton ships that are too large to pass through the Canal. Colón 2000's developer, Corporación de Costas Tropicales, has created a tour company, **Adventuras**

2000 (www.colon2000.com), which offers a series of shore excursions highlighting Panama's history, culture, and diverse natural attractions (see "Best Cruise Line Shore Excursions," below). The project has opened many new jobs to locals, who are being trained as bilingual tour guides, drivers, and so on.

Colón 2000's glass-and-marble terminal building has a large lounge, an Internet cafe, a huge duty-free shopping mall (part of the Colón Free Zone, the second-largest tax-free zone in the world), restaurants, and crafts shops. Unfortunately, the town surrounding the splashy new development remains poverty stricken and extremely unsafe, so tourists absolutely should not wander around town. With all the activity in the Colón Free Zone and the organized tours offered by ships, there's enough to keep any cruise ship passenger occupied there.

Another new development in Colón, the **Cristobal Cruise Terminal (Pier 6),** has piers for two ships of any size, along with a duty-free shopping area, restaurants, and telephones.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

The following excursions represent a sampling of those offered from Colón.

Emberá Indian Village Tour ($87, 3 hr.): Today, Panama's Emberá Indians live much as they did in the early 16th century, when their first tourist—Vasco Nunez de Balboa, who "discovered" the Pacific Ocean—came through. You'll travel by dugout canoe up the Chagres River, visit the Emberá village, witness a performance of traditional dance, and (surprise, surprise) have an opportunity to purchase handicrafts.

Kayak in the Panama Canal ($132, 9 hr.): From Colón, you'll travel to Sol Melina, where you'll spend about an hour kayaking amid the plant life, mammals, and birds. You'll then head by bus to the Gatun Locks for a look at the Canal's workings.

Panama City Tour ($95, 5½ hr.): Visit the ruins of Old Panama, founded in 1519 by Pedro Arias Davila and destroyed in 1671 by the pirate Sir Henry Morgan; head to colonial Panama, built to replace the original capital; and then visit the Miraflores Locks for a look at the Canal.

Monkey Watch ($87, 5½ hr.): After a 30-minute ride at high speed through the heart of the Panama Canal, the boat will slow down and enter the labyrinth of jungle-covered islands of Gatun Lake. Wildlife is plentiful in this protected area: You'll likely encounter capuchin monkeys, three-toed sloths, howler monkeys, toucans, turtles, butterflies, crocodiles, and more.

PANAMA CITY

If you're not in the mood to shop in the Duty-Free Zone, take a tour of Panama City. It's sophisticated with a modern downtown area—with the heart of Latin America's banking industry—and still has Spanish colonial remnants in Casco Antiguo. If you want to discover Panamanian city life, this is the place to go—not Colón.

Visit the **Amador Causeway (Calzada de Amador),** where you can take in views of the city skyline and Bridge of the Americas. When you want to stop for food, go to **Café Barko** on the Flamingo Island section of the Causeway, which specializes in Panamanian cuisine and seafood. You won't be disappointed.

One of the best things about Panama City is its proximity to the rainforests. **Metropolitan Nature Park** is the only rainforest within a capital city in the Americas. Observe toucans, woodpeckers and parrots within their natural habitat. **Soberania Rainforest** is just 25km (16 miles) out of Panama City and is abundant with wildlife,

including 500 different bird species. You'll see monkeys, sloths, crocodiles, and other animals that you'll never find in your own backyard.

Exploring the rainforest is a must if you're in Central America, but do it with a guide, as you don't want to risk getting lost in unfamiliar terrain. If you don't go with one of the tours from the cruise ship, then go with **Advantage Tours Panama** (✆ **507/232-6944;** www.advantagepanama.com). Many of the bilingual guides have science degrees and are armed with knowledge about the local wildlife and environment; if possible, request Guido Berguido—he's amazing. The half-day "Metropolitan Rainforest" tour starts at $64.

PORTS ALONG THE CANAL ROUTE

The **San Blas Islands** are a beautiful archipelago and home to the Kuna Indians, whose women are well known for their colorful, hand-embroidered stitching. If you get a chance to go ashore, the tiny women, dressed in their traditional *molas* (bright, intricately appliquéd blouses), sell all manner of this textile art in square blocks and strips, all of which are known as molas and make great pillow covers or wall hangings. They cost about $10 each, but don't try to bargain too much—these gals will only go so low before standing firm. When your ship anchors offshore at the islands, be prepared for throngs of Kunas to emerge from the far-off distance, paddling (or, in a few cases, motoring) their dugout canoes up to the ship, where they will spend the entire day calling for money or anything else ship passengers toss overboard. The Kunas seem to enjoy diving overboard to retrieve coins thrown, but it's a sad sight, too, watching entire families so needy, and it makes you feel damn guilty for rolling in on that fancy cruise ship.

In Costa Rica, many ships call at **Puerto Caldera,** on the Pacific side, or **Puerto Limón,** on the Atlantic side. While there's nothing to see from either cargo port, both are great jumping-off points for tours from ships of the country's lush, beautiful rainforests, which are alive with some 850 species of birds, 200 species of mammals, 9,000 species of flowering plants, and about 35,000 species of insects. After a scenic bus ride, tours will take you on a nature walk through the jungle or on a mild white-water rafting trip.

In Guatemala, most Panama Canal–bound ships call at **Puerto Quetzal,** on the Pacific coast; a few may call at **Santo Tomas,** on the Caribbean side. Both are used as gateways to Guatemala's spectacular Maya ruins at Tikal. They're the country's most famous attractions, and are considered the most spectacular yet discovered, with more than 3,000 temples, pyramids, and other buildings of the ancient civilization—some of them dating as far back as A.D. 300—nestled in a thick, surreal jungle setting. Excursions here are neither cheap nor easy—a 10-hour tour involves buses, walking, and a 1-hour flight, and costs about $500—but the journey is well worth the effort. Excursions to the less spectacular Maya sites in Honduras are also offered from Puerto Quetzal, as are several overland tours of Guatemala's interior.

19 Puerto Rico

San Juan, the capital of Puerto Rico, has the busiest ocean terminal in the West Indies and is one of the cruise trade's most important ports. While cruise groups, by their sheer size, can overwhelm many ports of call, San Juan absorbs them with ease. The San Juan metropolitan area, home to about a third of Puerto Rico's 3.8 million people, is one of the largest and most sophisticated urban centers in the Caribbean, with all the amenities of a modern major city: great shopping, interesting neighborhoods, beautiful

San Juan as a Port of Embarkation

Puerto Rico is the number-one port of embarkation in the Caribbean, with more than 1.2 million visitors embarking on 700 cruises every year from here. Most cruise lines sell pre- and post-cruise packages that include hotel stays.

GETTING TO SAN JUAN & THE PORT **Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport (✆ 787/791-1014)** is on the city's east side, about 7½ miles from the port. Taxi fares from the airport are fixed at $10 to Isla Verde, $15 to Condado and Ocean Park, and $20 to Old San Juan and the cruise ships. The ride to the port takes at least 30 minutes—longer if traffic is heavy, and it often is.

ACCOMMODATIONS Following are some hotels that are commonly part of cruise line packages, plus a couple of others. Rates are per room based on double occupancy.

- **Sheraton Old San Juan Hotel & Casino,** 100 Brumbaugh St. (✆ **800/325-3535** or 787/721-5100; www.sheratonoldsanjuan.com), on the waterfront across the street from the cruise ship docks. Rates start at $199.
- **Hotel El Convento,** 100 Calle del Cristo (✆ **800/468-2779** or 787/723-9020; www.elconvento.com), a former Carmelite convent, with large rooms, many with views of the Old Town. Rates start at $210.
- **El Condado Plaza Hotel & Casino,** 999 Ashford Ave. (✆ **866/317-8934** or 787/721-1000; www.condadoplaza.com), in Condado, the original high-rise, high-glamour section of modern San Juan, to the east of Old Town. Rates start at $219.
- **San Juan Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino,** 1309 Ashford Ave., also in Condado (✆ **800/464-5005** or 787/722-7000; www.marriott.com). Rates start at $285.

people, excellent restaurants, glamorous bars and nightclubs, and fine museums. **Old San Juan** is the prime haunt for cruise passengers because it's the most beautiful, historic part of town and because the docks are right at its foot. The neighborhood's hilly cobblestone streets are lined with brightly painted colonial town houses, colonial churches, intimate parks, and sun-drenched plazas. Like the pyramids of Egypt and the Great Wall of China, Old San Juan's Spanish colonial forts and city walls are United Nations World Heritage Sites, and our top pick for spending your day here.

COMING ASHORE Almost all cruise ships dock at historic **Old San Juan,** but during periods of heavy volume, you may get stuck at one of the much less convenient cargo piers across the water from the Old Town, requiring a taxi ride. Over the next few years, plans call for more docks and attractions to the east of the current piers.

GETTING AROUND Old San Juan is eminently walkable, if hilly. **Taxis** operated by the Tourist Transportation Division are available at the piers. They're metered in San Juan, but the fare structure between major tourism zones is standardized. The set rates from the cruise ship piers are $6 to Old San Juan, $10 to Condado, and $16 to Isla Verde. The minimum fare is $3. After 10pm, there's a night charge (add $1 to the meter reading). Call **Metro Taxi** (✆ **787/725-2878**) or **Taxi Association** (✆ **787/795-5286**) for a cab.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **Spanish** is the native tongue, but most people on the island also speak **English** (both are official languages here). The farther you venture from San Juan, the more likely it is you'll have to practice your Spanish. Because Puerto Rico is part of the United States, the **U.S. dollar** is the currency of the realm.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Unless you want a guide to offer historical perspective ($33, 2½ hr.), don't bother with organized tours of Old San Juan—it's easy enough to get around on your own. On the other hand, if you explore somewhere farther afield, an organized tour is a good idea.

El Yunque Rainforest ($40, 4–5 hr.): Get acquainted with one of Puerto Rico's premier natural wonders. After arriving at Baño Grande, a natural swimming hole, hike half an hour along the Camimitillo trail and see parrot nests, giant ferns, orchids, and palms. Listen for the song of Puerto Rico's national symbol, the tiny coqui tree frog. After a short stop at an interpretive station, proceed to Yohakú observation tower and Coca waterfall.

Rainforest Horseback Adventure ($96, 3½ hr.): Once you get to the ranch, you'll meet your horse, briefly learn the ropes, and then ride down a beautiful beach. Take a quick swim during the refreshment stop.

City Tour & Bacardi Rum Distillery ($35, 4 hr.): After a tour of the old city, with a stop at the San Cristóbal fort, you'll travel to the Bacardi distillery to learn about the Puerto Rican sugar and rum industries, watch giant fermenting tanks transform sugar cane into rum, learn how to pronounce the product's name (Baa-carrrr-*di!*), and then get a taste for yourself.

WALKING TOUR OLD SAN JUAN

The streets are narrow and teeming with traffic, but strolling through Old San Juan is like walking through 5 centuries of history. More than 400 Spanish colonial buildings from the 16th and 17th centuries, many featuring intricate wrought-iron balconies with lush hanging plants, have been lovingly restored here. The streets' blue paving stones were originally used as ballasts by ships crossing the ocean from Spain. Although Old San Juan is a National Historic Zone, it's as vibrant today as it's ever been. Block after block, you'll find shops, cafes, museums, plazas, people, and pigeons. The crowds thin out by late afternoon, so linger around to experience Old San Juan's more sedate charms.

Begin your adventure near the post office, amid the taxis, buses, and urban hubbub of:

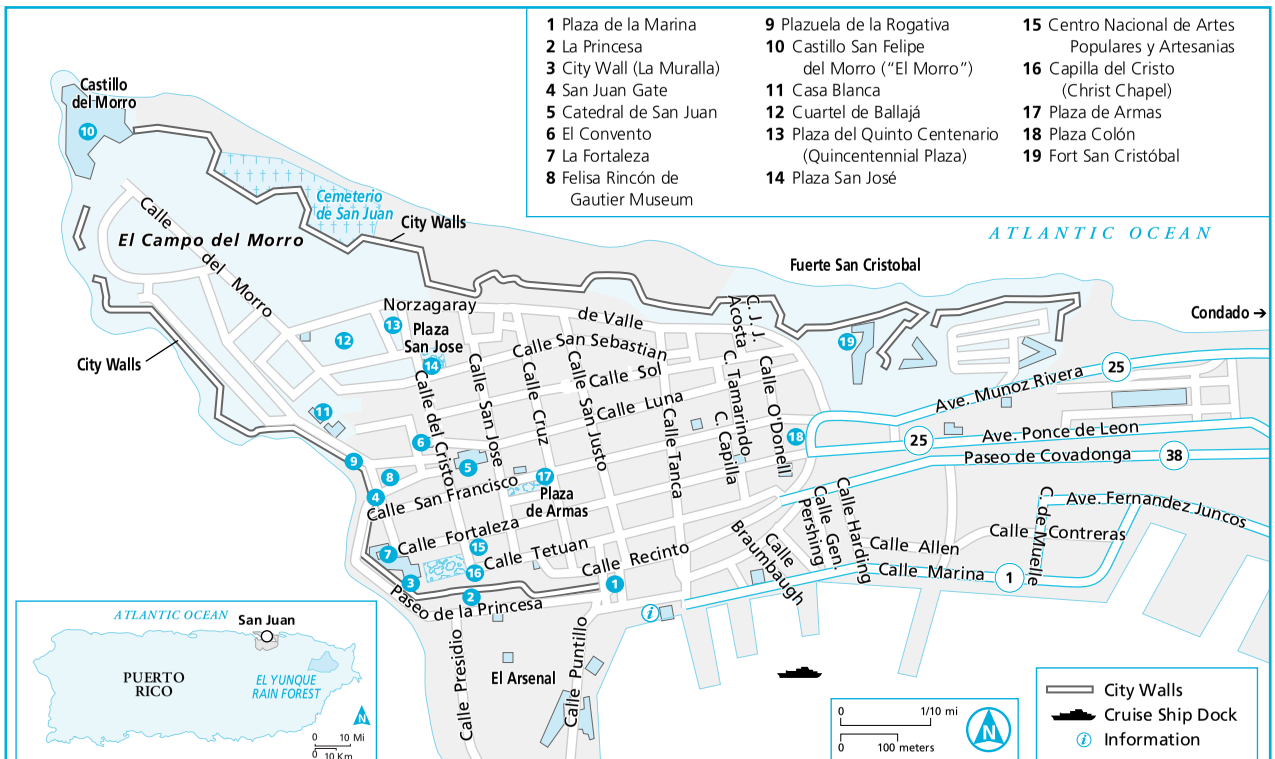
❶ Plaza de la Marina

The plaza is a small park that overlooks San Juan Bay, which was one of the New World's most important harbors for trading and military protection. Walking west from the plaza, you'll come to San Juan's showcase promenade, El Paseo de Princesa. This renovated 19th-century walkway traces the ancient city walls past heroic statues, gurgling fountains, and landscaped gardens.

Proceed along the Paseo to:

❷ La Princesa

This gray-and-white building on the right served as one of the Caribbean's most notorious prisons for centuries. Today, it houses contemporary Puerto Rican art exhibits and the offices of the Puerto Rico Tourism Company.



Old San Juan Walking Tour

Continue walking westward to the fountain near the sea's edge. Turn right and follow the promenade as it skirts the base of the:

❸ City Wall (La Muralla)

The wall was completed in the 1700s and once formed part of the New World's most impregnable defenses against enemy invaders and pirates. Marvel at the immensity, antiquity, and engineering genius of the wall, which on average is 40 feet high and 20 feet thick.

Follow the promenade until you reach the:

❹ San Juan Gate

The gate stands at Calle San Juan and Recinto del Oeste. Turn right through the portal. The gate was built in 1635 and served as the main entrance into San Juan. Today, it's the only remaining passage through the wall into the city.

Walk up the tree-lined San Juan Street to the:

❺ Catedral de San Juan

If you'd like to retrace the steps of the colonial visitors of old San Juan, stop by the cathedral and make an offering as a thank you for a safe journey.

The original thatched-roof wooden cathedral, built in the early 1520s, was destroyed by a hurricane in 1529. Reconstruction in 1540 added a circular staircase and vaulted Gothic ceilings, but most of the current church was built in the 1800s. Look for the tomb of Ponce de León and the wax-encased mummy of St. Pio, a Roman martyr (153 Calle del Cristo; ✆ **787/722-0861;** free admission; daily 8am–5pm).

Across the street is:

❻ El Convento

The New World's first Carmelite convent, El Convento opened in 1651 with 30-foot walls designed to withstand hurricanes and enemy attacks. The building remained a convent for 250 years, but fell on hard times early in the 20th century and served as a dance hall and flophouse. Today, the beautifully restored building is the Hotel El Convento, possibly Puerto Rico's most elegant hotel (see "San Juan as a Port of Embarkation," earlier).

Waking away from Cathedral Plaza, head West down Las Monjas to the wrought-iron gates of:

❼ La Fortaleza

Also known as Santa Catalina Palace, La Fortaleza is the residence of Puerto Rico's governor. Although it initially served military purposes, it's now the oldest executive mansion in continuous use in the Western Hemisphere (built in 1540). English-language tours are given on weekdays, every hour from 9am to 5pm.

Now retrace your steps along Calle Recinto del Oeste, downhill to Caleta de San Juan. The colonial house at no. 51, on the northeast corner, is the:

❽ Felisa Rincón de Gautier Museum

This is the former home of one of San Juan's most popular mayors. An organizer of the city's women and other dispossessed people, Fela, as her many admirers called her, swept into power in 1946 and led the city for 22 years.

Walking back to Calle Recinto del Oeste, turn right and proceed 1 block to Caleta de las Monjas. Fork left to a panoramic view and a modern statue marking the center of:

❾ Plazuela de la Rogativa

According to local legend, the British, while besieging San Juan in 1797, misidentified the flaming torches of a *rogativa,* or religious procession, as Spanish reinforcements. Frightened by the display, the would-be invaders hastily retreated. Statues in this plaza memorialize the event.

Continue west, parallel to the city wall, passing through a pair of urn-topped gateposts. The road will fork. Bear to the right and continue climbing the steep cobblestone-covered ramp to its top. Walk west across the field toward the neoclassical gateway leading to the:

❿ Castillo San Felipe del Morro ("El Morro")

The big draw in Old San Juan, this castle had a strategic position that was the envy of the Caribbean for several centuries. It's

where Spanish Puerto Rico defended itself against the navies of Great Britain, France, and Holland, as well as hundreds of pirate ships. First built in 1539, and substantially enhanced in 1787, the fortress was part of a comprehensive defense network. The six-level complex rises 140 feet above the sea on a rocky promontory. You can spend the better part of the morning exploring its labyrinth of dungeons, barracks, towers, ramps, and tunnels on your own. Check out the small, air-conditioned military museum and the gift shop. Both El Morro and San Cristóbal (see no. 19, below) are managed by the U.S. National Park Service, with continuous video presentations and guided tours in English (admission $3; San Cristóbal daily 9am–6pm, El Morro daily 9am–5pm).

Retrace your steps through the treeless field to Calle del Morro; then walk uphill to the small plaza at the top of the street. On the right is:

⓫ Casa Blanca

Though it was his family home, Juan Ponce de León, the conquistador and Puerto Rico's first governor, never actually lived here. While the structure was being built, he was off looking for the Fountain of Youth, ironically dying from battle wounds along the way, in 1521. The city's oldest fort, Casa Blanca, was San Juan's only defense against attacks until La Fortaleza was completed in 1533. Today, it has a small museum (1 Calle de San Sebastián; ✆ **787/724-4102;** admission $3; closed Sun) illustrating Indian life and 16th- and 17th-century colonial family life. The garden and fountains in back are a tranquil respite from the streets.

Exit through the front entrance and walk downhill, retracing your steps for a half-block; then head toward the massive tangerine-colored building on your right, the:

⓬ Cuartel de Ballajá

These former military barracks once housed 1,000 Spanish soldiers and their families. Built between 1854 and 1864, the complex is the last and largest military building erected by Spain in the Western Hemisphere. Today, the building's second floor is home to the **Museo de las Américas** (**Museum of the Americas;** Cuartel de Ballajá; ✆ **787/724-5052;** admission $3; closed Mon), which showcases Caribbean as well as North, Central, and South American cultures. The popular art exhibits focus on housing and furniture styles, handicrafts, tools, musical instruments, toys, clothing, and religious objects. The carved wooden saints *(santos)* are especially interesting.

Exit through the barracks' eastern door, where you'll immediately spot the dramatic and modern:

⓭ Plaza del Quinto Centenario (Quincentennial Plaza)

This plaza is dominated by a large, totem-pole-like column that commemorates the 500th anniversary of Columbus's arrival.

Now walk a short block southeast to the borders of:

⓮ Plaza San José

This plaza features a statue of Juan Ponce de León cast from an English cannon captured during a 1797 naval battle. Three sites around this square are worth visiting. Built in 1532, the **Iglesia de San José** is where Ponce de León's descendants worshipped, and features beautiful artwork. Check out the exterior while the church interior is under restoration. Next door is the **Galeria Nacional,** part of the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriquena (admission $3). Four rooms tell the history of art in Puerto Rico, beginning with religious works from early colonial times to modern art. The **Museo Pablo Casals** (✆ **787/723-9185;** admission $1; closed Sun–Mon) honors the Spanish-born cellist who adopted Puerto Rico as his home; it displays his cello, his piano, and original manuscripts of his music. The **Museo de Nuestra Raíz Africana** (**Museum of Our African Roots;** ✆ **787/724-4294;**

admission $2; closed Sun–Mon) traces the slave experience and focuses on African contributions to local music, dance, clothing, art, cuisine, religion, and language. Placards are in Spanish.

Now walk 2 blocks south along Calle del Cristo, through one of the Caribbean's most attractive shopping districts. After passing Calle Fortaleza, look on your left for the:

⓯ Centro Nacional de Artes Populares y Artesanias

Operated by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, this center, at 253 Calle del Cristo (✆ **787/722-0621;** admission $3; closed Sun), displays a collection of the island's folk arts and crafts.

Continue to the southernmost tip of Calle del Cristo (just a few steps away) to the wrought-iron gates that surround a chapel no bigger than a newspaper kiosk, the:

⓰ Capilla del Cristo (Christ Chapel)

Legend has it that in 1753, a young rider lost control of his horse in a race down Calle del Cristo during the feast of St. John the Baptist and plunged over the steep precipice at the street's end. A person who witnessed the tragedy promised to build a chapel if the young man's life were saved. Records maintain that the horseman died, but lore contends otherwise. In another version of the story, the horseman, after himself praying to God while falling over the cliff, survived to build the chapel. The delicate silver altar here can be seen through glass doors (free admission; Mon, Wed, and Fri).

Retrace your steps about a block north along the Calle del Cristo; then turn right on Calle Fortaleza. A block later, take a left onto Calle San José and proceed another block to the capital's liveliest square, the:

⓱ Plaza de Armas

This broad, open plaza has lots of pigeons, several old men playing dominos, office workers and shoppers basking in the sun, and a 19th-century statue representing the four seasons. Originally used for military drills, the plaza now hosts folk dances and concerts on weekends. The neoclassical **Intendencia** (which houses offices of the U.S. State Department) and the **Alcadía** (San Juan's city hall) flank the square.

Walk east along the plaza's northern border, Calle San Francisco, for 4 blocks until you reach another square:

⓲ Plaza Colón

This park is notable for its **statue of Cristóbal Colón (Christopher Columbus).** Bronze plaques at the monument's base commemorate episodes in the explorer's life.

Finally, walk to the plaza's northeast corner, where Calle San Francisco meets Boulevard del Valle. Turn left and follow the signs to:

⓳ Fort San Cristóbal

Built in 1634 (and expanded in the 1770s), this fortress rises more than 150 feet above the sea. A complex maze of tunnels and moats connects the central fort with wave after wave of outlying posts. Don't miss the Garita del Diablo (Devil's Sentry Box), a lonely post at the edge of the sea where, legend has it, the devil himself snatched away solitary sentinels. (The fort is uphill from Plaza Colón on Calle Norzagaray; ✆ **787/729-6960;** admission $3; ticket stubs from El Morro are good for admission here, too.)

CASINOS

Most large hotels have casinos, which are one of San Juan's biggest draws. They're generally open daily from noon to 4am, but some never close. The **Casino at the Ritz-Carlton,** Avenue of the Governors, Isla Verde (✆ **800/241-3333** or 787/253-1700), is the largest in Puerto Rico. Combining elegant 1940s decor with tropical fabrics and patterns, it's one of the plushest entertainment complexes in the Caribbean. The **InterContinental San Juan,** 5961 Isla Verde Ave. (✆ **800/496-7621** or

Puerto Rico Golf Excursions

Puerto Rico is a golfer's dream, but you'll need to sign up for a ship excursion or rent a car to reach the major courses from San Juan.

- **Hyatt Hacienda Del Mar** (✆ **800/554-9288** or 787/796-3000; www.hyatt.com) has the greatest concentration of golf courses in the Caribbean, with 72 holes. All four 18-hole courses here were designed by Robert Trent Jones, Sr. Jack Nicklaus ranks the 4th hole at the Dorado Beach East course as one of the 10 best-designed holes in the world. Greens fees, including cart, are $195 for play before 1pm and $117 after 1:30pm. Club rentals are $59.
- **Doral Resort at Palmas del Mar** (✆ **787/285-2221;** www.palmascountryclub.com), 45 miles east of San Juan, has two courses: the par-71 Palm course, designed by Gary Player, and the newer 18-hole Flamboyan course, designed by Rees Jones. Greens fees at the Palm or the Flamboyan are $180 for 18 holes, including cart, plus $40 for clubs.
- **Wyndham Rio Mar Beach Resort & Spa** (✆ **877/636-0636** or 787/888-6000; www.wyndhamriomar.com), 20 miles from San Juan in Rio Grande, also has two 18-hole courses, one designed by Tom and George Fazio, the other by Greg Norman. Greens fees, including cart, are $150 to $230 ($90–$140 for play after 2pm).

787/791-6100), is another elegant place to rendezvous. One of its Murano glass chandeliers is, they say, "longer than a bowling alley." Most convenient for cruise ship passengers, the **Sheraton Old San Juan Hotel & Casino,** 100 Brumbaugh St. (✆ **800/325-3535** or 787/721-5100), is directly across from Pier 3 and often bustling.

BEACHES

Puerto Rico is ringed by hundreds of miles of sandy beaches, and you won't have to leave San Juan to play in the surf. Perhaps the most famous beach in the Caribbean, **Condado Beach,** at the western end of Ashford Avenue, is the backyard playground of Condado's resort hotels. A favorite of families, it can get pretty crowded in winter. The beaches of **Isla Verde,** behind the hotels and condominiums along Isla Verde Avenue, are less rocky and are excellent for people-watching. Both have white sand, palm trees, ocean breezes, beautiful bodies, and plenty of bars and eateries. Snorkeling gear and other watersports equipment can be rented.

SHOPPING

San Juan has some great bargains—prices here are often even lower than those in St. Thomas—and U.S. citizens pay no duty on items bought in Puerto Rico. The streets of the Old Town, especially **Calle San Francisco** and **Calle del Cristo,** are a major shopping venue. Local handicrafts can be good buys, including *santos* (handcarved wooden religious figures), needlework, straw work, hammocks, loose-fitting guayabera shirts, papier-mâché masks, and paintings and sculptures by local artists.

20 Roatán, Honduras

Roatán, the largest of Honduras's Bay Islands, is also the most visited destination in the country. It has been on the cruise map for a number of years, but only recently graduated to the major leagues, with lines like Carnival, Princess, HAL, Norwegian, Costa, and Royal Caribbean scheduling calls at its port. Measuring almost 40 miles in length and with a total landmass of 127 square km (49 sq. miles), the island has a mountainous backbone and is totally surrounded by the world's second largest barrier reef, which allows for superb diving as well as excellent fishing, and it has great beaches. An added bonus is that the beaches and towns are much less crowded than in places like Cozumel, and the place is still charmingly rough around the edges, though English seems as widely spoken as Spanish. Both in its shore waters and interior, Roatán is a prime ecotourism destination, with wildlife reserves, marine mammal encounters, reef diving, and other watersports. At the western tip of the island, **West Bay** has Roatán's best beach, while the community of **West End** (just 5 min. away) is full of bars, souvenir shops, and restaurants—from Thai and Italian spots to countless Honduran restaurants serving traditional local foods like *sopa de gallina* (chicken broth seasoned with basil and spearmint) and *platos tipico* (tortillas with beef and rice and beans). Most cruise passengers head here or take a shore excursion.

COMING ASHORE Ships dock in **Coxen Hole,** the island's largest community (named after the 17th-century pirate John Coxen, and also known as **Roatán City**). However, there's only docking room for one ship, so any additional ships in port have to tender their passengers ashore. At this writing, Carnival Corporation was also building a new port to the east, with docking space for two megaships plus an on-site welcome center. At press time, it was expected to open in time for the fall 2009 season.

GETTING AROUND You'll find plenty of **taxis** lined up right at the cruise dock to take you around the island. Unfortunately, some taxis try to rip off customers with outlandish fares on days when ships are in port, so be sure to settle on a price before getting in. A daily rate for an island tour should cost about $100 (for the whole taxi, not per person), while the average trip between the pier and West End or West Bay should cost between $7.50 and $10 per person. **Water taxis** are a good option to get between West End and West Bay. It's about a 10-minute ride and costs $2. Look for the dock near Foster's Bar in West End. The return trip from West Bay has two easily identifiable pickup spots. **Bicycle rentals** are available at **Captain Van's** (✆ **504/403-8751;** www.captainvans.com) in West End for $9 per day.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **Spanish** is the main language in Honduras, but most people on the Bay Islands speak English as well. The native languages of Lenca, Miskitu, and Garifuna are also spoken in some regions. Honduras's currency is the **Honduran lempira** (19 HNL = US$1; 1 HNL = US 5¢), but U.S. dollars are widely accepted as well throughout the Bay Islands. Some establishments may charge an additional fee for processing credit cards. All prices in this section are in U.S. dollars.

CALLING FROM THE U.S. To place a call to Honduras, you need only dial **011** before the numbers listed in this section.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Coral Cay Snorkel Adventure ($56, 5½ hr.): Take a 15-minute bus ride to the Coral Cay Marine & Nature Park, where certified snorkel guides will lead you through the

marine park's labyrinthine coral reefs, home to tropical fish, brain coral, sea fans, and other marine life—maybe even sea turtles and nurse sharks.

Certified Dolphin Dive ($114, 2hr.): Take a short ride to Anthony's Key Resort and the Roatán Institute for Marine Sciences, where you'll head out by boat with a dive guide, dolphin behaviorist, and videographer. You'll spend 45 minutes observing, photographing, and playing with the dolphins in the open ocean, in a one-tank dive at depths of up to 18m (60 ft.) over a white-sand bottom, adjacent to a shallow reef wall. Divers need a certification card to participate. Nondivers can take part in a dolphin swim also offered on property ($75, 2½ hr.).

Garifuna Experience & Mangrove Tunnel ($75, 4 hr.): A 30-minute bus ride takes you to Roatán's northeast shore to experience the culture of the Garifuna people, descendants of slaves who settled here in 1797. The tour includes a dance performance, crafts and cooking demonstrations, and a little dose of history; it also includes a visit to a stilt village and a 30-minute boat ride through canals with the intertwined boughs of mangrove trees as roofing overhead.

Pirates, Birds & Monkeys at Gumbalimba Park ($52, 3 hr.): Gumbalimba Park is a one-stop shop for all things Roatán: a tropical bird and animal sanctuary with resident macaws and capuchin monkeys; hiking trails through a botanical garden full of orchids and heliconia; a beach destination and watersports center; with a restaurant and "pirates' cave" thrown in for good measure. This tour basically gives you access to all of that, to explore at your leisure. By the time you read this, cruise lines will probably also have resumed **zipline canopy tours** at the site. At this writing, they were underplaying them after a snapped cable caused the death of a cruise passenger in March 2008.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

The area around the Coxen Hole piers holds few attractions, just lots of tourist shops. Carnival's new Mahogany Bay will have a welcome center, shops, restaurants, and bars just off the docks.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

West End is the most popular village on the island, with restaurants, bars, shopping, and proximity to West Bay.

If you want something a little different, head to the village of French Harbour, about 25 minutes from Coxen Hole on the south side of the island. On the outskirts, in French Key, **Sherman Arch's Iguana Farm** is home to between 2,500 and 3,000 iguanas of four different species. You can take a tour, feed and pet the lizards, and greet the resident yellow-necked parrots and macaws that live on the property. Getting there is easy: Take a taxi along the road leading east from French Harbour toward the Fantasy Island Hotel. You'll see a clearly marked sign showing the detour toward the farm. Admission is $5.

BEACHES

The best beaches on the island are **Half Moon Bay** and **West Bay.** Half Moon Bay is a small beach right at the entrance to West End, and is bordered by a fossilized, raised coral. The reef passes right along the mouth of Half Moon Bay, an easy swim from shore. West Bay is about 5 minutes from West End. Scattered with resorts, this beach is blessed with powdery white sands and the reef an easy swim from the shore. Boat transfers are available from West End, and you can rent kayaks along the beach.

SHOPPING

The best place to find souvenirs on the island is in West Bay, whose single lane dirt road has a variety of shops selling Honduran-made goods, including Lenca pottery that is unique to the country.

21 St. Barts

Chic, sophisticated St. Barts (or, technically, St. Barthélemy, a name no one ever uses) is internationally renowned as one of the ritziest refuges in the Caribbean; rivaled only by Mustique or Anguilla, it's the preferred island retreat of the rich and famous, attracting the likes of Tom Cruise, Harrison Ford, and Mikhail Baryshnikov. Yet despite all the hoopla, St. Barts retains its charm, serenity, natural beauty, and incredibly French flavor. In contrast to most Caribbean islands, where descendants of African slaves form the majority, St. Barts's 8,000 year-round residents are primarily of French ancestry. **Gustavia,** the main port (whose name hearkens back to the 19th century, when Sweden controlled the island), is full of French restaurants and semi-chic, semibohemian nightspots. Many of the small luxe ships that call here stay into the evening so passengers can enjoy a night out. Away from town, the island is full of dramatic hills and pristine white-sand beaches.

COMING ASHORE Cruise ships anchor off **Gustavia,** the main town, and ferry passengers to the dollhouse-size harbor and town via tenders.

GETTING AROUND **Taxis** congregate at Gustavia's harbor to take cruise passengers to the beaches. Rates are set by the government but taxis are not metered. For **car rentals,** Budget, Avis, Hertz, and National all have offices here. If you want some stylin' Euro-fun, rent a Suzuki Samurai, a MINI Cooper, or a bright-lime-green Smart Car, the hippest toys on the island, for a ride up and down the picturesque, hilly local roads.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **French** is the official language, but virtually everyone speaks **English** as well. St. Barts is part of the French overseas region of Guadeloupe, so the **euro** (€) is the official currency (.75€ = US$1; 1€ = US$1.33). U.S. dollars are commonly accepted.

CALLING FROM THE U.S. When calling St. Barts from the United States, dial the international access code **(011)** and the country code **(590)** before the numbers listed here, which also begin with 590. That's right: If you want to make a connection, you have to dial 590 twice. It's just one of those oddities that makes the world go 'round.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Jet-Set Boat & Beach Excursion ($200, 4 hr.): Circumnavigate St. Barts in a 40-foot cruiser; then tender ashore at St. Jean Beach to swim, snorkel, and have drinks from the open bar.

St. Barts on Horseback ($55, 2 hr.): Travel to northern St. Barts for a relaxed guided ride through the island's outback.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

For a taste of the island's celebrity vibe, make a beeline to **Le Select,** rue de la France at rue du Général de Gaulle (✆ **590/27-86-87**), the epicenter of Gustavia's afternoon social life for more than 60 years. This cafe's tables rest in a tree-shaded garden a block from the harbor. A full bar is available, along with simple meals. The classic, funky

ambience inspired Jimmy Buffett's "Cheeseburger in Paradise," and a mix of salty locals and chic tourists typically make up the clientele. If you arrive earlier in the day, the place to brunch is across the street at **Bar de L'Oublie** (✆ **590/27-70-06**), where you can get French service without a side of attitude.

Aside from hanging out, shopping, and eating, cruisers sticking close to port can also visit Gustavia's modest points of interest. **St. Bartholomew's Church,** on rue Samuel Fahlberg, dates from 1855 and has limestone and volcanic stone walls, as well as imported pitch-pine pews. Across from the dock, on the opposite side of the harbor, the **Municipal Museum,** on rue Duquesne (✆ **590/29-71-55**), is an unfocused but respectable introduction to the history, sociology, ethnology, economy, and ecology of the island. The most interesting items include Amerindian artifacts, rustic farm furnishings, and clothing used by early French settlers. Admission costs about $3; closed Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, and Sunday. Walking around the harbor takes a pleasant 20 minutes.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

Visiting the tiny fishing village of **Corossol** is a vibrant way to experience the St. Barts of the past. About 10 minutes by taxi from the dock, this quaint, totally unchic hamlet was once home to traditional folk who still lived off the sea. Until not too long ago, you could still spot women in traditional 17th-century bonnets. That generation has all but died off, but Corossol is still a charming destination.

On the town's waterfront, just to the left of the road from Gustavia, the **Inter Oceans Museum** (✆ **590/27-62-97**) catalogs thousands of shells, corals, sand dollars, sea horses, sea urchins, and fish from around the world, all displayed in an endearingly homemade style (literally homemade—the museum is an extension of the owner's house). Don't miss the collection of sand from beaches around the world: A cocktail umbrella is planted in each specimen. Admission is about $4, but be sure to call first as the owner is old and ailing. Stop by **Le Regal** (✆ **590/27-85-26**) afterward and have a beer or a bite with the locals.

BEACHES

The 22 beaches of St. Barts are first rate. Few are ever crowded, even during the peak season, and all are public, free, and easily accessible by taxi from the cruise pier (make arrangements with your driver to be picked up at a specific time). St. Barts is a French island, so toplessness is common at all beaches. As you drive along, keep an eye out for small signs indicating beach access.

Shell Beach, so named for the mounds of tiny pink shells that litter the beach, is just a short walk from the harbor in Gustavia, is the most convenient place to soak up the sun if your time is limited. The water isn't always calm and there is a tiny drop-off, making it necessary to supervise children. **Do Brazil** (✆ **590/29-06-66**), a lively fusion restaurant right on the beach, is an ideal spot for lunch or watching the sunset. You can also grab a sandwich to go at **Zen Beach Bar** (✆ **590/27-19-39**).

If you're looking for an active beach strand, with restaurants and watersports, **Grand Cul de Sac** fits the bill, with waters that are shallow, warm, and protected. An even busier and equally social beach, **St. Jean** is actually two beaches divided by a rock promontory. Protected by a coral reef, the calm waters here attract families and watersports enthusiasts, including windsurfers, and there are numerous eating, drinking, shopping, and people-watching opportunities. Because it's near the airstrip, you have

the added fun (or stress) of watching small planes take off and land. The short taxi ride will cost you about $40 each way, so bring friends to defray the cost.

Gouverneur, on the southcentral coast, is quiet and relatively remote. Its idyllic setting and unspoiled beauty make it a favorite with locals. Farther east, in a wild and rustic area that was once the site of salt ponds, **Saline** is reached by a 3-minute hike over a sand dune. Most famous for its adult environment and nude bathers, it also boasts great bodysurfing waves.

SHOPPING

A duty-free port, St. Barts is a good place to buy liquor, perfume, and other French luxury items. Good buys on apparel, crystal, porcelain, and watches can also be found, especially during April, the biggest sale month. Moisturizer mavens can stock up on the island's own cosmetic line, Ligne St. Barth.

Shops are concentrated in Gustavia and St. Jean, where the quality-to-schlock ratio is as high as anywhere in the Caribbean. Most shops and offices close for a long lunch, usually from 1 to 3pm, but then stay open until 7pm.

22 St. Kitts

Somewhat off the beaten tourist track, south of St. Martin and north of Guadeloupe, St. Kitts forms the larger half of the combined Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis, two islands separated by only about 3.2km (2 miles) of ocean. St. Kitts—or St. Christopher, a name hardly anyone uses—is by far the more populous of the two islands, with some 35,000 people. St. Kitts is almost ridiculously lush and fertile, dotted with rainforests and waterfalls and boasting some lovely beaches along its southeast coastline; it's also extremely poor, still dependent on the same sugar cane crop that brought riches to its English plantation owners (and hot misery to its slaves) back in colonial days. Cane fields climb the slopes of its volcanic mountain range, and you'll see ruins of old mills and plantation houses as you drive around the island. **Basseterre,** the capital city, is full of old-time colonial architecture, but it's a small-scale place with little to offer visitors beyond a pleasant walk around. The island's most impressive landmark, **Brimstone Hill Fortress,** is about 15km (9⅓ miles) west of town.

COMING ASHORE **Port Zante** has undergone a rebuilding and expansion, including a second cruise pier that, at press time, was scheduled to be completed in 2009. Shopping, restaurants, and a welcome center are close by. Additional vessels may dock at nearby commercial **Birdrock Deepwater Port,** about 3km (2 miles) from downtown Basseterre.

GETTING AROUND You can walk around Basseterre, but you'll need **taxis** to get anywhere else. They greet cruise passengers (loudly) at the docks and also around the Circus, a public square near the docks at the intersection of Bank and Fort streets. Taxis aren't metered, so you must agree on the price before heading out; a 3-hour tour of the island will cost you about $60. Always ask if the rates quoted are in U.S. dollars or Eastern Caribbean dollars.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **English** is the language of both St. Kitts and Nevis. The local currency is the **Eastern Caribbean dollar** (EC$2.71 = US$1; EC$1 = US37¢). Many shops and restaurants quote prices in U.S. dollars; always determine which currency locals are talking about before making a purchase.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Brimstone Hill Fortress & Gardens ($46, 3 hr.): Among the largest and best-preserved forts in the Caribbean, **Brimstone Hill** (www.brimstonehillfortress.org) dates from 1690, when the British fortified the hill to help recapture Fort Charles, situated below, from the French. Today, it's the centerpiece of a national park crisscrossed by nature trails, with a population of green vervet monkeys to keep things lively. Perched on the upper slopes of a tall, steep hill, it's a photographer's paradise, with views of mountains, fields, and the Caribbean Sea. Tours typically include a visit to the beautiful **Romney Gardens,** set amid the ruins of a sugar estate between Basseterre and the fort. You can check out the lush hillside gardens or shop at **Caribelle Batik** (✆ **869/465-6253**), one of the island's most popular boutiques, where artisans demonstrate their Indonesian-style hand-printing amid rack after rack of brightly colored clothes. It's open Monday to Friday 8:30am to 4pm, Saturday and Sunday 8:30am to 1pm.

Mount Liamuiga Volcano Hike ($109, 7 hr.): This dormant volcano, in the northwest area of the island, has long been known as "Mount Misery." On this excursion, you'll hike about 240m (800 ft.) to the summit, traveling along narrow trails and through the island's rainforest. It takes about 3 hours to reach the top. Refreshments are offered before the hike back down. This is a great trip if you're in shape.

Mountain Biking & Beach Tour ($78, 4 hr.): From the pier, you'll ride through Basseterre, and then out through sugar cane fields and up 450m (1,476-ft.) Olivees Mountain for views and refreshments. After the ride down, you'll stop at Friar's Bay for a swim and snack. It's a nice way to see this lush island.

Rainforest & Gardens Hiking Safari ($57, 3 hr.): Departing from Romney Gardens, you'll hike along a loop of trails through lush rainforest. With luck, you'll catch sight of some of the island's resident monkeys.

Sail & Snorkel Catamaran Trip ($95, 3½ hr.): A sailing catamaran takes you to secluded Smitten's Bay for snorkeling among diverse reef fish and coral formations. Complimentary snacks are served aboard the boat on your return trip.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

The capital city of Basseterre, where the docks are located, has typical British colonial architecture and some quaint buildings and a few shops. Drop by the **marketplace,** where country people bring baskets brimming with mangos, guavas, soursop, mammee apples, and wild strawberries and cherries just picked in the fields. Tropical flowers abound. The town is built around a so-called **Circus,** the town's round square. A tall green Victorian clock stands in the center of the Circus. After Brimstone Hill Fortress, **Berkeley Memorial Clock** is the most photographed landmark of St. Kitts. In the old days, wealthy plantation owners and their families used to promenade here. **St. George's Anglican Church,** on Cayon Street (walk straight up Church St. or Fort St. from the dock), is the oldest church in town and is worth a look. **Independence Square,** a stone's throw from the docks along Bank Street, is pretty, with its central fountain and old church, but there's no good reason to linger unless it's to sit in the shade and toss back a bottle of Ting, the local grapefruit-based soda.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

All of the good out-of-town sites on St. Kitts are covered under "Best Cruise Line Shore Excursions," above.

BEACHES

The narrow peninsula in the southeast contains the island's salt ponds and also boasts the best white-sand beaches (approach via the winding, hilly road for a dramatic and gorgeous view); beaches in the north are made of gray volcanic sand. You'll find the best swimming at **Conaree Beach,** 5km (3 miles) from Basseterre; **Frigate Bay,** with its talcum-powder-fine sand; and the twin beaches of **Banana Bay** and **Cockleshell Bay,** at the southeast corner of the island, where you can have a bite at the nearby restaurant and where you might just be greeted by the resident pig, Wilbur. If you're lucky, the green vervet monkeys may come down from the hillside behind the beach to say hello as well. Food and drink are available. (***Beware:*** The monkeys have been known to steal drinks from unsuspecting tourists.) All beaches, even those that border hotels, are free and open to the public. You must, however, usually pay a fee to use a hotel's beach facilities.

SHOPPING

Basseterre is not a shopping town, though you will find local specialties in a handful of shops, ranging from paintings to pottery, jewelry, jams, teas and handmade batik fabrics. The most popular shop with visitors is probably **Caribelle Batik,** which is a stop on many shore excursions (see above).

23 St. Lucia

With a turbulent history shared by many of its Caribbean neighbors, St. Lucia (pronounced *Loo*-sha) changed hands often during the colonial period, being British seven times and French seven times. Today, though, it's an independent state that's become one of the most popular destinations in the Caribbean, with some of the finest resorts. The heaviest development is concentrated in the northwest, between the capital of Castries and the northern end of the island, where there's a string of white-sand beaches. The interior boasts relatively unspoiled green-mantled mountains and gentle valleys, as well as the volcanic **Mount Soufrière.** Two dramatic peaks—the **Pitons**—rise along the southwest coast.

Castries, the capital, has grown up around an extinct volcanic crater that's now a large harbor surrounded by hills. Because of fires that devastated many of its older structures, the town today has touches of modernity, with glass-and-concrete buildings, although there's still an old-fashioned Saturday-morning market on Jeremie Street. The country women dress in traditional cotton headdresses to sell their luscious fruits and vegetables, while weather-beaten men sit close by playing *warrie* (a fast game played with pebbles on a carved board) or dominoes using tiles the color of cherries.

COMING ASHORE Most cruise ships arrive at the fairly new pier at **Pointe Seraphine,** within walking distance of the center of Castries and boasting St. Lucia's best shopping right on-site. Two mid- to large-size cruise ships can be accommodated. With the rapid increase in cruise tourism, the limited capacity at Pointe Seraphine may necessitate docking at **Port Castries,** an industrial terminal on the other side of the colorful harbor. There's a shopping terminal here called La Place Carenage. Some smaller lines, such as Star Clippers and Seabourn, visit other sites around the island, anchoring off **Rodney Bay** to the north or **Soufrière** to the south and carrying passengers ashore by tender.

GETTING AROUND There is an official **taxi** association servicing both Pointe Seraphine and La Place Carenage, with standard fares posted. You can hire a taxi to go to Soufrière, too. Many taxi drivers offer 3- to 4-hour tours, with a stop at the beach, for about $135 for four people. From Castries, the fare to Marigot Bay should be about $15. Be sure to find out whether you're talking U.S. or E.C. dollars before agreeing on a price.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **English** is the official language. The official currency is the **Eastern Caribbean dollar** (EC$2.71 = US$1; EC$1 = US37¢), though shops and restaurants commonly take the U.S. dollar as well. Be sure you know which currency locals are talking about before making a purchase.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Because of the difficult terrain, shore excursions are the best means of seeing this beautiful island in a day or less. In addition to the sampling below, most ships typically offer bus tours (many visiting the island's banana plantations) and snorkeling cruises.

Pigeon Island Sea Kayaking ($75, 3 hr.): After transferring to Rodney Bay, you'll make the roughly 30-minute paddle out to the island, where you'll have time to swim, kayak some more, or make the steep climb up to Fort Rodney. From the summit, you'll have great views of the Pitons; sometimes you'll even be able to see Martinique.

Rainforest Bicycle Tour ($60, 4½ hr.): After being dropped off by bus in the middle of the forest, you'll ride past banana plantations and the Errard Falls waterfall, stopping to sample various fruits that grow along the roadside. Some time for swimming at the falls is usually included. A different tour called **Jungle Biking** ($104, 4½ hr.) takes you by boat to the Jungle Biking facility on an 18th-century sugar plantation. Here, you can explore 16km (10 miles) of trails at your own pace. Beach time is included at the end.

Soody Nature Hike & Mineral Waterfall ($69, 7 hr.): Drive along the west coast through fishing villages, banana plantations, and the edge of the rainforest before arriving at Soufrière, location of the Pitons and the Diamond Botanical Gardens. A guided 1-hour hike through the volcanic forest introduces you to the island's flora and fauna, ending up at a therapeutic sulfuric waterfall where you can take a dip to cure whatever ails you. Lunch at a Creole restaurant is included.

Beach Snorkel ($70, 3½ hr.): Snorkeling is spectacular around St. Lucia. This trip departs the Castries harbor by boat, traveling an hour en route to the island's marine reserve, which has a special area for snorkeling. There's also a supersize 7-hour ($97) version of this trip that includes a buffet lunch.

Caribbean Pirates Extravaganza ($89, 4 hr.): The 42m (138-ft.) **Brig *Unicorn*** was featured in several ***Pirates of the Caribbean*** movies and was also used in the filming of the TV miniseries, *Roots.* Swashbucklers and wenches alike can board this beauty and set sail to Pigeon Island, in search of buried treasure, or just a patch of sand and a relaxing swim.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

The principal streets of Castries are **William Peter Boulevard** and **Bridge Street.** Don't miss a walk through town: People are very friendly, and **Jeremie Street** is chockablock with variety stores of the most authentic local kind, selling everything from spices to housewares. A Roman Catholic cathedral stands on **Columbus Square,**

which has a few restored buildings. Take a gander at the enormous 400-year-old "rain" tree, also called a "no-name" tree, that grows in the square. The nearby **Government House** is a late-Victorian structure.

Beyond Government House lies **Morne Fortune,** which means "Hill of Good Luck." Actually, no one's had much luck here, certainly not the French and British soldiers who battled for **Fort Charlotte.** The fort switched between the two sides many times. You can visit the 18th-century barracks, complete with a military cemetery, a small museum, the Old Powder Magazine, and the "Four Apostles Battery"—four grim muzzle-loading cannons. The view of the harbor of Castries is panoramic from this point. You can also see north to Pigeon Island or south to the Pitons. To reach Morne Fortune, head east on Bridge Street.

Castries has a very colorful **Central Market,** right near the dock, that's also worth a visit. The airplane-hangar-size emporium sells local food, trinkets, and produce. Buy some banana ketchup or local cinnamon sticks to take home.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

St. Lucia's first national park, the 18-hectare (44-acre) **Pigeon Island National Landmark** (✆ **758/453-7656;** www.slunatrust.org), was originally an island, but is now joined to the northwest shore of the mainland by an environmentally unfriendly causeway. It's about 30 minutes by taxi from Castries. The park, an ideal spot for picnics and nature walks, is covered with lemon grass, which spread from original plantings made by British light opera singer Josset, who leased the island for 30 years and grew the grass to provide thatch for her cottage's roof. The island's **Interpretation Centre** contains artifacts and a multimedia display of local history, covering everything from the Amerindian settlers of A.D. 1000 to 1782's Battle of Saints, when Admiral Rodney's fleet set out from Pigeon Island and defeated the French Admiral De Grasse. Right below the interpretation center is the cozy **Captain's Cellar Pub,** located in what was formerly a soldiers' mess. From the tables outside, you get amazing scenes of the crashing surf on the Atlantic coast, just a few steps away. From here, you can walk up the winding and moderately steep path to a **lookout,** from which you get a wonderful view that stretches all the way to Martinique. Two white-sand beaches lie on the island's west coast. Island admission is $5.

La Soufrière, a fishing port and St. Lucia's second-largest settlement, is dominated by Petit Piton and Gros Piton, collectively known as the **Pitons,** two of the dramatic pointed peaks that rise right from the sea to 738m and 786m (2,421 ft. and 2,579 ft.), respectively. Formed by lava and once actively volcanic, these mountains are now cloaked in green vegetation, with waves crashing around their bases. Their sheer rise from the water makes them such visible landmarks that they've become the symbol of St. Lucia. Near the town lies the famous "drive-in" volcano, **La Soufrière,** a rocky lunar landscape of bubbling mud and craters seething with fuming sulfur. You can literally drive into an old crater and walk between the sulfur springs and pools of hissing steam. The fumes are said to have medicinal properties. A local guide is usually waiting nearby; if you do hire a guide, agree—and then doubly agree—on what the fee will be. Nearby are the **Diamond Mineral Baths,** also called Botanical Gardens. They were originally constructed in 1784 by order of Louis XVI, whose doctors told him that these waters were similar in mineral content to the waters at Aix-les-Bains. The baths were built to help French soldiers who had been fighting in the West Indies recuperate from wounds and disease. For about $6, you can bathe and benefit from

the recuperative effects of the baths yourself. Open daily from 10am to 5pm, Fridays until 3pm.

BEACHES

If you don't take a shore excursion, you might want to spend your time on one of St. Lucia's famous beaches, all of which are open to the public, even those at hotel properties (though you must pay to use a hotel's beach equipment). Taxis can take you to any of the island's beaches, but we recommend that you stick to the calmer shores along the western coast, because the rough surf on the windward Atlantic side makes swimming potentially dangerous.

Leading beaches include **Pigeon Island,** off the northern shore, with white sand and picnic facilities; **Vigie Beach,** north of the Castries harbor, with fine sand; **Marigot Beach,** south of the Castries harbor, framed on three sides by steep emerald hills and skirted by palm trees; and **Reduit Beach,** between Choc Bay and Pigeon Point, with fine brown sand. Just north of Soufrière is a beach connoisseur's delight, **Anse Chastanet** (✆ **758/459-7000**), boasting an expanse of white sand at the foothills of lush mountains. This is a fantastic spot for snorkeling, with spectacular coral reefs starting only a little way offshore, providing shelter for thousands of fish and other sea creatures. **Choc Bay** is a long stretch of sand and palm trees on the northwestern coast, convenient to Castries, with tranquil waters especially appealing for families with small children. You'll find miles of white sand at the beach at **Vieux Fort,** at the southern end of the island. Reefs protect the crystal-clear waters here, rendering them tranquil and ideal for swimming. At the southern end of the windward side of the island is **Anse des Sables,** which opens onto a shallow bay swept by trade winds that are great for windsurfing.

SHOPPING

You'll find some good but not remarkable buys on bone china, jewelry, perfume, watches, liquor, and crystal. Souvenir items include designer bags and mats, local pottery, and straw hats—again, nothing remarkable. ***Tip:*** If your cruise is also calling in St. Thomas, let the local vendors know; it may make them more amenable to bargaining.

Built for cruise ship passengers, **Pointe Seraphine** has the best collection of shops on the island. You must present your cruise pass when making purchases here.

24 St. Martin/Sint Maarten

Who can resist a two-for-one deal? That's what you get on St. Martin, a 96-sq.-km (37-sq.-mile) island that's been shared by France (with 52 sq. km/20 sq. miles of it) and the Netherlands (with 44 sq. km/17 sq. miles) for more than 350 years. Although the border between the two sides is virtually imperceptible—a monument along the road marks the change in administration—each side retains elements of its own heritage. The French side, with some of the best beaches and restaurants in the Caribbean, emphasizes quiet elegance. French fashions and luxury items fill the shops, and the fragrance of croissants mixes with the spicy aromas of West Indian cooking. The Dutch side, officially known as Sint Maarten, reflects Holland's anything-goes philosophy: Development is much more widespread, flashy casinos pepper the landscape, and strip malls make the larger towns look as much like Anaheim as Amsterdam. The 100% duty-free shopping has turned both sides of the island into a bargain hunter's paradise.

COMING ASHORE Cruise ships usually dock on the Dutch side, at **Dr. A. C. Wathey Pier,** about 1.6km (1 mile) southeast of Philipsburg. The majority of passengers are then tendered to the smaller Captain Hodge Pier at the center of town, but others choose to walk the distance on a newly developed boardwalk or take taxis. The pier can accommodate up to four vessels; any more than that may anchor in **Great Bay,** a superquick ride by tender from the Captain Hodge Pier, where a terminal has shops, food outlets, ATMs, and an Internet cafe. Smaller vessels sometimes dock on the French side of the island, at **Marina Port la Royale,** adjacent to the heart of Marigot.

GETTING AROUND **Taxis** on both sides of the island are unmetered. Agree on a rate and currency before getting in. Dutch law requires that drivers list government-regulated fares based on two passengers. Shorter rides, including the route between Marigot and Philipsburg, average around $15; longer trips can climb to $20-plus. Privately owned and operated **minivans,** with signs to indicate their destination, can be hailed anywhere on the street. Fares are usually about $1.50. **Rental cars** are a great way to see both sides of the island. Avis, Budget, and Hertz all have offices here. **Water taxis** are also a popular way to get around.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY Surprise, surprise: The official language on the Dutch side is **Dutch,** and the official language on the French side is **French.** Most people on both sides also speak **English.** The legal tender in Dutch Sint Maarten is the **Netherlands Antilles guilder** (1.78 ANG = US$1; 1 ANG = US56¢), and the official currency on the French side is the **euro** (.75€ = US$1; 1€ = US$1.33). Most prices are also quoted in U.S. dollars, which are widely accepted on both sides.

CALLING FROM THE U.S. When calling Dutch Sint Maarten from the United States, simply dial the international access number **(011)** before the numbers listed here. Calling French St. Martin requires more of an effort: Dial **011** and then **590** before the numbers listed. Yes, 590 already appears in the numbers in this section, but those three digits must be dialed twice to make a connection.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

America's Cup Sailing Regatta ($89, 3 hr.): Get a taste of nautical exhilaration by competing in a race aboard an America's Cup–winning sailboat. This extremely popular hands-on excursion lets you grind winches, trim sails, and duck under booms—after you've been trained by professionals, of course. Alternatively, sit back and watch others do all the work.

Pinel Island Shore Snorkel & Beach Tour ($39, 3½ hr.): After a scenic bus ride to the French town of Cul de Sac, along the northeast coast, hop on a tender to the small offshore island of Ilet Pinel for some of St. Martin's best snorkeling.

Hidden Forest Hike ($84, 5 hr.): Take a 45-minute drive to Loterie Farm, where you'll do a 2-hour hike through the tropical forest, eventually emerging at Pic Paradise, the island's highest point. Along the way, your guide will point out a secret freshwater spring and the island's famous guava berry trees. Return to the farm for a complimentary rum or fruit punch and a typical Caribbean farmhouse lunch.

Butterfly Farm & Marigot ($45, 3½ hr.): After a scenic drive through both the French and Dutch sides of the island, walk through a surrealistic enclosed garden with pools, waterfalls, and hundreds of exquisitely beautiful and exotic butterflies from around the world. Amusing guides identify species, describe courtship and mating rituals, and

give tips on attracting butterflies to your garden at home. Afterward, absorb the Creole charm and French atmosphere of Marigot.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Shopping, sunbathing, and gambling are the pastimes that interest most cruisers who hit this island, but folks with a taste for culture and history can make a day of it here as well.

ON THE DUTCH SIDE Directly in front of the Philipsburg town pier, on Wathey Square, the **Courthouse** combines northern European sobriety with Caribbean brightness. Originally built in 1793 of freestone and wood, this venerable old building has suffered numerous hurricanes, but has been restored after each tempest and continues to house government offices. East of the Courthouse, down a little shopping alley, the tiny **Sint Maarten Museum,** 7 Front St. (✆ **599/542-4917**), features modest, cluttered exhibits that focus on the island's history and geology. The second-floor gallery is open weekdays from 10am to 4pm, but closed Saturday and Sunday. Admission is free.

Fort Amsterdam is the Dutch side's most important historic colonial site. Since 1631, it has looked out over Great Bay from the hill west of Philipsburg. The fort was the Netherlands' first military outpost in the Caribbean. The Spanish captured it 2 years later, making it their most significant bastion east of Puerto Rico. Peter Stuyvesant, who later became governor of New Amsterdam (now New York), lost his leg to a cannonball while trying to reclaim the fort for Holland. The site affords grand views of the bay, but ruins of the walls and a couple of rusty cannons are all that remain of the original fort.

Gambling is also big here, with several casinos clustered along Front Street in the heart of Philipsburg. All of them are open early enough to snag cruisers.

ON THE FRENCH SIDE **Fort St. Louis** is Marigot's answer to Fort Amsterdam. Built in 1767 to protect the waterfront warehouses that stored the French colony's agricultural riches, the cannons of this bastion frequently fired on hostile British raiders from Anguilla. After restorations and modification in the 19th century, the fort was eventually abandoned. In addition to the fort's cannons, crumbling walls, and French tricolor flag flapping in the breeze, the short climb up the hill flanking Marigot Bay's north end affords splendid vistas. As a respite from the sun, duck into Marigot's **Museum of Saint Martin** (✆ **590/29-22-84**), next to the tourism office and adjacent to the marina. Much more thorough and scholarly than its Philipsburg counterpart, this institution boasts a first-rate collection of Ciboney, Arawak, and Carib artifacts excavated from the island's Amerindian sites, plus a reproduction of a 1,500-year-old burial mound. Another display details the history of the plantation and slavery era, while early-20th-century photographs trace the island's modern development. Admission costs about $5; closed Sunday.

Sint Maarten Golf Excursions

The **Mullet Bay Golf Course** (✆ **599/545-2850**), on the Dutch side, has an 18-hole course designed by Joseph Lee, which is considered one of the more challenging in the Caribbean, especially the back 9. Mullet Pond and Simpson Bay lagoon provide both beauty and hazards. Greens fees, including carts, are $130 for 18 holes, $85 for 9 holes. Club rental is an additional $30 for 18 holes. The course opens daily at 7am.

BEACHES

St. Martin has more than 30 beautiful white-sand beaches—some social, some serene. The busier ones boast bars, restaurants, watersports, and hotels, where changing facilities are usually available for a small fee. Toplessness is ubiquitous; nudism is common on the French side, and increasingly evident on the Dutch side as well.

ON THE DUTCH SIDE **Great Bay Beach** is your best bet if you want to stay in Philipsburg. This mile-long stretch is convenient and has calm water, but it lacks the tranquillity and cleanliness of the more remote beaches.

Just west of the airport, on the west side of the island, **Maho Beach** boasts a casino, shade palms, and a popular beachside bar and grill. It's a good snorkeling spot, too. Farther west, **Mullet Beach** borders the island's golf course. Shaded by palm trees and crowded on weekends, it's popular with swimmers and snorkelers. On-site vendors rent an array of watersports equipment. **Dawn Beach,** on the east coast, is the best snorkeling site on the island. Rent equipment from Busby's Beach Bar, which is right on the sand.

ON THE FRENCH SIDE Far and away the island's most visited strand, **Orient Beach,** on the northeast coast, fancies itself the St. Tropez of the Caribbean. Hedonism is the name of the game here: plenty of food, drink, music, and flesh (a naturist resort occupies the beach's southern tip, but nudism isn't confined to any one area). Watersports abound. South of Orient Beach, the waveless waters of **Coconut Grove** or **Galion Beach** are shallow up to 30m (98 ft.) offshore. Protected by a coral reef, this area is popular with kids and windsurfers.

On the island's west coast, just north of the Dutch border, **Long Bay** is the island's longest beach and another refuge for adults seeking peace and quiet. There are no facilities here, but this wild beach bordering some of the island's grandest mansions is popular with the rich and (sometimes) famous. The water and sand here are silky. **Friars Beach,** just outside of Marigot, is a quiet sheltered cove at the end of a bumpy road, with gorgeous views of the neighboring island Anguilla on clear days. Beach chairs, umbrellas, and food are available on the beach.

SHOPPING

St. Martin is a true free port—no duties are paid on any item coming in or going out—and neither side of the island has a sales tax. Shops on the much busier Dutch side are concentrated in Philipsburg, along **Front Street** and the numerous alleys radiating from it. The district is largely nondescript, but you'll find all the usual jewelry/gift/luxury-item shops, as well as some quirky local boutiques. In general, prices in the major stores are nonnegotiable, but at small, family-run shops, you can try your luck with a little polite bargaining. The T-shirt and souvenir epicenter is in the open-air market behind the Courthouse in front of the town pier. **Guavaberry Emporium,** 8–10 Front St., sells Guavaberry "island folk liqueur," an aged rum with a distinctive fruity, woody, almost bittersweet flavor; it's available only on St. Martin.

On the French side, Marigot has a much calmer, more charming, and sophisticated ambience, with waterfront cafes where you can rest your weary feet after shopping. Many stores here close their doors for a 2-hour lunch break starting at noon. The wide selection of European merchandise is skewed toward an upscale audience, but French crystal, perfume, liqueur, jewelry, and fashion can be up to 50% less expensive than in the U.S.

25 U.S. Virgin Islands: St. Thomas & St. John

Ever since Columbus discovered the Virgin Islands during his second voyage to the New World in 1493, they have proven irresistible to foreign powers seeking territory; at one time or another, they've been governed by Denmark, Spain, France, England, Holland, and, since 1917, the United States.

Vacationers discovered **St. Thomas** right after World War II and have been flocking here ever since. Tourism and U.S. government programs have raised the standard of living to one of the highest in the Caribbean, and today the island is one of the busiest and most developed cruise ports in the West Indies, often hosting more than six ships a day during the peak winter season. **Charlotte Amalie** (pronounced Ah-*mahl*-yah), named in 1691 in honor of the wife of Denmark's King Christian V, is the island's capital and has become the Caribbean's major shopping center.

The most tranquil and unspoiled of the U.S. Virgins is **St. John,** the smallest of the lot, more than half of which is preserved as the gorgeous **Virgin Islands National Park.** A rocky coastline, forming crescent-shaped bays and white-sand beaches, rings the whole island, whose miles of serpentine hiking trails lead past the ruins of 18th-century Danish plantations and allow panoramic ocean views. A few ships anchor directly off St. John, but those that dock in St. Thomas usually offer excursions here as well, via ferry.

St. Croix, the largest of the USVIs, gets nowhere near as many visitors as St. Thomas, making for a more tranquil port experience. (A number of years back, a spate of robberies and muggings against passengers and crew drove most cruise lines out of St. Croix, though a concerted effort by the island recently to improve conditions has seen some lines returning.) The island's major attraction is Buck Island Reef National Monument, an offshore park full of gorgeous coral reefs.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **English** is spoken on all three islands, and the **U.S. dollar** is the official currency. Americans get a break on shopping in the U.S. Virgins, as they can bring home $1,600 worth of merchandise without paying duty, as opposed to $400 from most other Caribbean ports. You can also bring back more liquor from here. See section 5, "Tipping, Customs & Other End-of-Cruise Concerns," in chapter 3 for more **Customs** information.

ST. THOMAS

With a population of more than 50,000 and a large number of American expatriates and temporary sun-seekers in residence, tiny St. Thomas isn't exactly a tranquil tropical retreat. You won't have any beaches to yourself. Shops, bars, and restaurants (including a lot of fast-food joints) abound here, and most of the locals make their living off the tourist trade.

COMING ASHORE Most cruise ships anchor at **West Indian Dock/Havensight Mall.** Located along the southern end of Charlotte Amalie Harbor, 2½ miles from the town center, it has its own restaurants, bookstores, banks, postal van, and lots of duty-free shops. The dock can accommodate three to four large ships, or one to two megaships. If Havensight is clogged with cruise ships, you'll dock at the **Crown Bay Cruise Ship Terminal,** to the west of Charlotte Amalie. The two piers can accommodate three ships of varying size, although unlike Havensight, they cannot dock the megaships. If both terminals are at capacity, ships anchor in **Charlotte Amalie Harbor.** From the terminals, some people make the long, hot, 30-minute-plus walk into Charlotte

Amalie, but it's not terribly picturesque. A taxi ride into town costs about $6; keep in mind there are often traffic jams, so it could take as much as 30 minutes or longer to get into town on the busiest days.

GETTING AROUND **Taxis** are the chief means of transport here. They're unmetered, but a guide of point-to-point fares around the island is included in most tourist magazines. A typical fare from Havensight Mall to Magens Bay, for a day at the beach, runs from $10 per person or $7 per person in a shared cab. If you want to hire a taxi and a driver (who just may be a great tour guide) for a day, expect to pay about $25 per person for 2 hours of sightseeing in a shared car, or $50 per hour for two to four people. Less formal, privately owned **taxi vans** make unscheduled stops along major traffic arteries, charging less than a dollar for most rides. If you look like you want to go somewhere, one will likely stop for you. They may or may not have their final destinations written on a cardboard sign displayed on the windshield.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

In addition to the excursions below, a huge number of booze cruises, island tours, and beach/snorkeling tours are offered here. The waters off these islands are rated among the most beautiful in the world.

Coral World & Island Drive ($56, 3 hr.): Coral World Underwater Observatory and Marine Park is St. Thomas's number-one attraction. The 3½-acre complex features a three-story underwater observation tower 100 feet offshore, plunging the depths to allow views of tropical fish, coral formations, sharks, and other sea beasts. In the Marine Gardens Aquarium, saltwater tanks display everything from sea horses to sea urchins, and a Touch Pool lets you fondle some of them. Another tank is devoted to sea predators, including circling sharks.

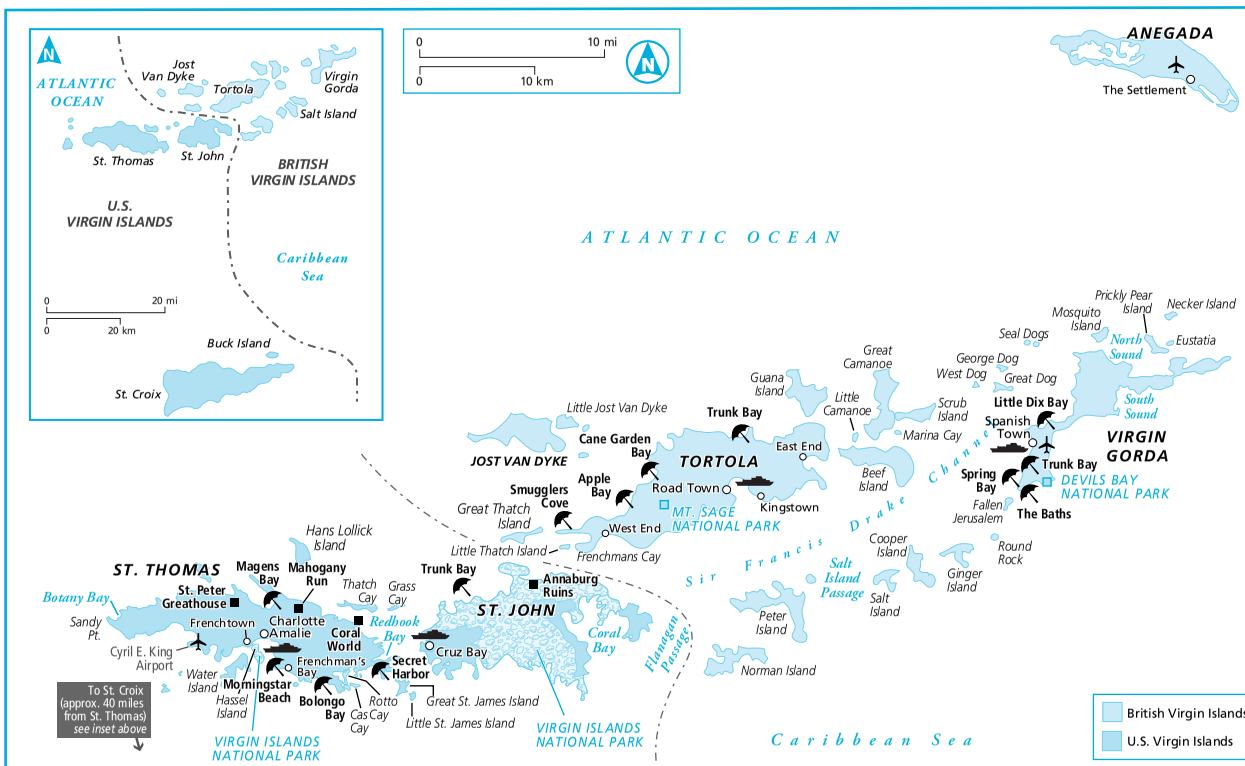
Kayaking the Marine Sanctuary ($80, 3½ hr.): Paddle a kayak from the mouth of the marine sanctuary at Holmberg's Marina and spend nearly an hour among the mangroves while a naturalist explains the ecosystem. This trip includes a free half-hour to go snorkeling or walk along the coral beach at Bovoni Point.

St. John Ecohike ($69, 4 hr.): Take the ferry to St. John for a walkabout through Virgin Islands National Park. The Lind Point Trail ascends about 250 feet to the Lind Point Overlook for views of St. John, St. Thomas, and the surrounding islands. An expert guide discusses the park's ecosystem and St. John's cultural history while you walk to Honeymoon Beach for a bit of swimming.

Water Island Bike Trip & Beach Adventure ($79, 3½ hr.): After a ferry ride to Water Island, a 5-minute bus ride brings you to the island's highest point, from which you get a nice downhill ride. Your guide will point out various historic sights and wildlife en route to Honeymoon Beach, where you can swim and enjoy a drink.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

In days of yore, seafarers from all over the globe flocked to the old Danish town of Charlotte Amalie, including pirates and, during the Civil War, Confederate sailors. The old warehouses that once held pirates' loot still stand and, for the most part, contain shops, shops, and more shops. The main streets (called *gades* here in honor of their Danish heritage) are a veritable shopping mall, especially close to the waterfront. Stray farther landward and you'll find pockets of 19th-century houses and the truly charming, brick-and-stone **St. Thomas Synagogue,** built in 1833 by Sephardic Jews high on steep, sloping Crystal Gade. There's a great view from here as well.


ATLANTIC OCEAN
Jost Van Dyke
Tortola
Virgin Gorda
Salt Island
St. Thomas
St. John
BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS
U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS
Caribbean Sea
0 20 mi
0 20 km
Buck Island
St. Croix
0 10 mi
0 10 km
ANEGADA
The Settlement
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Little Jost Van Dyke
JOST VAN DYKE
Cane Garden Bay
Apple Bay
Smugglers Cove
Great Thatch Island
Little Thatch Island
Frenchmans Cay
TORTOLA
Trunk Bay
East End
Road Town
Kingstown
West End
MT. SAGE NATIONAL PARK
Guana Island
Great Camanoe
Little Camanoe
Beef Island
Scrub Island
Marina Cay
George Dog
West Dog
Great Dog
Seal Dogs
Mosquito Island
Prickly Pear Island
Necker Island
Eustatia
North Sound
South Sound
Little Dix Bay
Spanish Town
Trunk Bay
Spring Bay
Fallen Jerusalem
The Baths
VIRGIN GORDA
DEVILS BAY NATIONAL PARK
Channel
Drake
Sir Francis
Salt Island Passage
Cooper Island
Ginger Island
Round Rock
Salt Island
Peter Island
Norman Island
Flanagan Passage
Coral Bay
ST. JOHN
Trunk Bay
Annaburg Ruins
Cruz Bay
Redhook Bay
Hans Lollick Island
Thatch Cay
Grass Cay
ST. THOMAS
Magens Bay
Mahogany Run
St. Peter Great House
Charlotte Amalie
Frenchtown
Coral World
Secret Harbor
Frenchman's Bay
Morningstar Beach
Bolongo Bay
Botany Bay
Sandy Pt.
Cyril E. King Airport
Water Island
Hassel Island
Rotto
Cas Cay
Great St. James Island
Little St. James Island
VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK
VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK
To St. Croix (approx. 40 miles from St. Thomas) see inset above
Caribbean Sea
British Virgin Islands
U.S. Virgin Islands

Dating from 1672, **Fort Christian,** 32 Raadets Gade, rises from the harbor to dominate the center of town. Named after Danish King Christian V, the structure has been everything from a governor's residence to a jail. Many pirates were hanged in its courtyard.

Seven Arches Museum, on Government Hill (✆ **340/774-9295**), is a 2-centuries-old Danish house completely restored to its original condition and furnished with antiques. You can walk through the yellow ballast arches and visit the great room with a view of the busy harbor. Admission is $7; open weekdays from 10am to 2pm (weekends by appointment).

The **Paradise Point Tramway** (✆ **340/774-9809;** www.paradisepointtramway.com) affords visitors a dramatic view of Charlotte Amalie Harbor at a peak height of 697 feet. The tramway transports riders from the Havensight area to Paradise Point, where they disembark to visit shops and a popular restaurant and bar. The cost is $21 round-trip.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

The lush **St. Peter Greathouse Estate and Gardens,** at the corner of St. Peter Mountain (Rte. 40) and Barrett Hill roads (✆ **340/774-4999;** www.greathouse-mountaintop.com), adorns 11 acres on the volcanic peaks of the island's northern rim. It's the creation of Howard Lawson DeWolfe, a *Mayflower* descendant who, with his wife, Sylvie, bought the estate in 1987 and set about transforming it into a tropical paradise. It's filled with some 200 varieties of plants and trees, including an umbrella plant from Madagascar. There's also a rainforest, an orchid jungle, waterfalls, and reflecting ponds. From a panoramic deck, you can see some 20 of the U.S. Virgin Islands. The house itself is worth a visit, its interior filled with local art. Admission is $12 adults, $8 seniors and kids.

BEACHES

St. Thomas has some good beaches, all of which are easily reached by taxi. Arrange for your driver to return and pick you up at a designated time. All the beaches in the U.S. Virgin Islands are public, but some still charge a fee. Mind your belongings, as St. Thomas has pickpockets and thieves who target visitors. If you're going to St. John, you may want to do your sunning there instead (see "Beaches" under "St. John," below), as the beach options there are generally nicer.

Located 3 miles north of Charlotte Amalie, across the mountains on the north side of the island, **Magens Bay Beach** was once hailed as one of the world's most beautiful, but it isn't as well maintained as it should be and is often overcrowded, especially when many cruise ships are in port. Admission is $5. Changing facilities, bathrooms, a snack bar, snorkel gear, and float rentals are available. In the northeast, near Coral World, **Coki Beach** is another good, but often crowded spot. Snorkelers come here often. Also on the north side, **Sapphire Beach** is one of the finest on St. Thomas, set against the backdrop of the Doubletree Sapphire Beach Resort & Marina complex, where you can lunch or order drinks. Windsurfers like this beach a lot; you can also rent snorkeling gear and lounge chairs.

On the island's south side, **Morningstar** lies about 2 miles east of Charlotte Amalie at Marriott's Frenchman's Reef Beach Resort. You can wear your most daring swimwear here. Sailboats, snorkeling equipment, and lounge chairs are available for rent. To reach the beach, take the cliff-front elevator at the Marriott. **Bluebeard's Beach Club,** just a little to the east, has a secluded setting. Farther east still, the

Bolongo Bay lures those who love a serene spread of sand. You can feed hibiscus blossoms to iguanas and rent snorkeling gear and lounge chairs here. There's also a variety of watersports, including parasailing. At the far eastern end, little **Secret Harbor** sits near a collection of condos. With its white sand and coconut palms, it's a veritable cliché of Caribbean charm.

SHOPPING

Shopping is the number-one activity in Charlotte Amalie, and you'll sometimes find well-known brand names at savings of up to 40% off prices in the U.S.—but you have to plow through a lot of junk to find the bargains. The main goodies are jewelry, watches, cameras, china, and leather, plus the local Cruzan Rum, which is so ridiculously cheap that you'll think it's mismarked.

Many cruise ship passengers shop at the **Havensight Mall,** where the ships dock, but the major shopping is along the harbor of Charlotte Amalie. **Main Street** (or Dronningens Gade, its old Danish name) is the prime shopping area, with nearby **Back Street,** or Vimmelskaft, not too far behind. Many shops are also spread along the **Waterfront Highway** (also called Kyst Vejen) and along the side streets. All the usual Caribbean mega-tourist-shops sell all the usual jewelry, watches, perfume, and gift items, but some more singular boutiques and gift shops are mixed in. At the **Vendors Plaza,** on the corner of Veterans Drive and Tolbod Gade, hundreds of street vendors ply their trade beneath oversize parasols. Food vendors set up on sidewalks outside.

ST. JOHN

A tiny gem, lush St. John lies about 3 miles east of St. Thomas across Pillsbury Sound. It's the smallest and least populated of the U.S. Virgins, only about 7 miles long and 3 miles wide, with a total land area of some 19 square miles. The island was slated for big development under Danish control, but a slave rebellion and the decline of the sugar cane plantations ended that idea. Since 1956, more than half of St. John's landmass, as well as its shoreline waters, have been set aside as the **Virgin Islands National Park** (www.virgin.islands.national-park.com), and today the island leads the Caribbean in eco- (or "sustainable") tourism. Miles of winding hiking trails lead to panoramic views and the ruins of 18th-century Danish plantations. Mysterious geometric petroglyphs incised into boulders and cliffs can be seen all over the island (ask a guide to point them out if you can't find them). These figures, of unknown age and origin, have never been deciphered. Because St. John is easy to reach from St. Thomas and the beaches are spectacular, many cruise ship passengers spend their entire day here.

COMING ASHORE Cruise ships cannot dock at either of the piers in St. John. Instead, they moor off the coast at **Cruz Bay,** sending in tenders to the National Park Service Dock, the larger of the two piers. Most cruise ships docking at St. Thomas offer shore excursions to St. John's pristine interior and beaches.

GETTING AROUND You'll find shops, bars, and restaurants right by the docks. Otherwise, the most popular way to get around the island is by **surrey-style taxi.** Typical fares from Cruz Bay are $8 to Trunk Bay, $10 to Cinnamon Bay, and $15 to Maho Bay. Taxis wait at the pier. You can also rent open-sided **jeeps;** Avis and Hertz both have offices here. Just remember to drive on the left, even though steering wheels are on the left, too. Go figure.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

St. John Island Tour ($59, 4½ hr.): Because most ships tie up in St. Thomas, tours of St. John first require a ferry or tender ride to Cruz Bay in St. John. Then you board open-air safari buses for a tour that includes a stop at the ruins of a working plantation (the Annaberg Ruins), as well as a pause at Trunk Bay or one of the other beaches. The island and sea views from the coastal road are spectacular.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Most cruise passengers dart through **Cruz Bay,** a cute little West Indian village with interesting bars, restaurants, boutiques, and pastel-painted houses. **Wharfside Village,** near the dock, is a complex of courtyards, alleys, and shady patios with a mishmash of boutiques, restaurants, fast-food joints, and bars.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

In November 1954, the wealthy Rockefeller family began acquiring large tracts of land on St. John. It then donated more than 5,000 acres to the Department of the Interior for the creation of **Virgin Islands National Park,** which Congress voted into existence on August 2, 1956. Over the years, the size of the park has grown steadily; it now totals 12,624 acres, including over two-thirds of St. John's landmass, plus submerged land and water adjacent to the island. Stop off first at the **visitor center** (✆ **340/776-6201**) right on the dock at St. Cruz, where you'll find some exhibits and learn more about what you can see and do in the park. Peddle along more than 20 miles of biking trails; rent your own car, jeep, or Mini-Moke; or take a hike. If you decide to hike, stop at the visitor center first to pick up maps and instructions. The starting points of some trails are within walking distance, while others can be reached by taxi for about $5 to $20. Within the park, try to see the **Annaberg Ruins,** on Leinster Bay Road, where the Danes founded thriving plantations and a sugar mill in 1718. They're situated off North Shore Road, east of Trunk Bay on the north shore.

BEACHES

For a true beach lover, missing the great white sweep of Trunk Bay would be like touring Europe and skipping Paris. That said, it's usually overcrowded. The beach has lifeguards and snorkeling gear is rented for exploring the underwater trail near the shore. Snorkelers find good reefs at Cinnamon Bay and Maho Bay, also a great place to spot turtles and schools of parrotfish. Changing rooms and showers are available.

SHOPPING

Compared to St. Thomas, St. John is a minor shopping destination, but the boutiques and shops at Cruz Bay are interesting and of good quality, though lacking in number. Most are clustered at **Mongoose Junction** (www.usvi.net/shopping/mongoose), in a woodsy area beside the roadway, about a 5-minute walk from the ferry dock in Cruz Bay.

11

Alaska & British Columbia

A series of images: Two black bears padding along the shoreline of Dundas Bay, eyeing us curiously as we drift just yards away in a kayak. Walking along the Totem Trail at Sitka's National Historic Park, struck by the intense artistry of the state's Southeast Native cultures. Plucking a 1945 edition of John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row* off the shelf of a used bookstore in Juneau, then chatting with the 70-something proprietor about the ups and downs of the author's reputation. Watching Metlakatla's traditional Killer Whale Dancers perform at the town's clan house, and hearing one young member enthused about a new beat he'd created that week. Seeing a humpback whale breach for the first time, hurling its tanker trunk body gracefully into the air, then letting it fall back to the water with the goofy joy of a beer drinker in a belly-flop contest. Standing on deck at midnight, looking up at the Milky Way and wondering if people ever get used to seeing skies like that. Flying over Juneau's Mendenhall Glacier in a helicopter and realizing the immensity of the thing for the first time, then landing for a 2-hour glacier hike, at one point stooping to drink from the cold meltwater on its surface.

It's practically impossible not to be amazed by Alaska. Much of its coastline is wilderness, with snowcapped mountain peaks, enormous glaciers, dense rainforests, deep fjords, and the cycles of geologic time visible all around. Visit the towns, and you'll find people who retain the spirit of frontier independence that brought them here in the first place. Add Alaska's history and heritage, with its rich Native culture, its European influences, and its gold-rush and oil-pipeline chutzpah, and you have a destination that is utterly and endlessly fascinating.

The fact that some 750,000 cruise passengers arrive annually has had its impact, of course, turning some towns into veritable tourist malls populated by seasonal vendors hawking imported souvenirs and jewelry—lots and lots of jewelry. Even in the most touristy towns, though, it's easy to get out and experience the real thing. In Skagway, take one of the trails that run off east of town and in 10 minutes you'll never know there are 6,000 other cruisers shopping behind you. In Ketchikan, walk in either direction out of the dockside tourist zone and you're suddenly in residential Alaska, where the real people live. Throughout Alaska, you'll also find the influence of the state's great **Native peoples,** who continue to make their presence felt in business, art, and politics: the Tlingit (pronounced Klink-*get*), Haida, and Tsimshian in the Southeast; the Athabascans of the interior; the Inupiat and St. Lawrence Island Yupiks of the far north; the Aleuts and Alutiiqs of the Aleutian Islands; and the Yup'ik and Cup'ik tribes of the extreme west.

Cruises in Alaska concentrate mostly on the **Inside Passage,** a series of connecting waterways threaded between the thousands of forested islands that make up the panhandle commonly known as

Southeast Alaska, or just **Southeast.** The passage actually begins in British Columbia, though ships bound north from Vancouver or Seattle tend to buzz through here quickly en route to Alaskan waters, which begin just south of Ketchikan. From there, the region is home to scattered fishing towns, a number of larger towns and cities (including state capital Juneau), and many of the natural wonders visited by most ships, including Glacier Bay National Park, Tracy Arm fjord, and (mostly for small ships) Misty Fjords National Monument. The area teems with wildlife, including large populations of whale, bear, eagle, sea lion, sea otter, and mountain sheep. North of Southeast, ships sailing one-way itineraries between Vancouver/Seattle and Anchorage also visit attractions such as Hubbard Glacier and College Fjord along the **Gulf of Alaska,** which starts just above Glacier Bay.

HOME PORTS FOR THIS REGION **Vancouver,** British Columbia, and **Seattle,** Washington, are the main southern terminals for Alaska cruises, with ships either sailing round-trip or doing alternating north- and southbound departures between here and either Seward or Whittier, the two main port towns for **Anchorage.** Some lines also offer Alaska cruises that sail round-trip from **San Francisco.** Most of the small ships sail from one or another of the ports in Southeast (primarily **Juneau,** but also Ketchikan and Sitka), and sometimes sail from Anchorage and Seattle as well.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY The language is English and the currency, for the most part, is U.S. dollars. In Vancouver you'll want to get some Canadian dollars, though both here and in Victoria, many businesses will also accept U.S. currency.

SHOPPING TIPS Shops throughout Alaska are chock-full of knockoff "Native Alaskan" art shipped in from Asia. So, when shopping for the real thing, ask the dealer for details about the artist, and also look for the **Silver Hand sticker,** a state certification that guarantees the item was, in fact, crafted in Alaska by a Native artist. What else will usually identify real pieces? Sky-high prices. You get what you pay for.

1 Cruising Alaska's Natural Wonders

Most Alaska cruises spend at least 3 days cruising the natural areas of the state's coast, including areas protected as national parks and national monuments. Regulations control access to some of them (most notably Glacier Bay, where only two large cruise ships and several smaller ones are permitted on any given day), while geography controls access to others: Misty Fjords, for instance, gets very narrow just where it gets most interesting, so only small ships can enter.

GLACIER BAY

There are about 5,000 glaciers in Alaska, but **Glacier Bay** (www.nps.gov/glba) definitely has the kind of name recognition that other glaciers can only dream about. Mostly, this is due to the fact that, in little more than 200 years, the area has gone from being a solid wall of ice up to 4,000 feet thick to being a 65-mile bay ecosystem full of wildlife, whales, and slowly returning vegetation, with glaciers extending up from its cold waters like fingers.

When first noted by Western man in 1794, Glacier Bay was just an indentation in the shoreline of Icy Strait, plugged by a glacial cork. A mere 105 years later, the ice had receded some 35 miles, allowing naturalist **John Muir** to penetrate a landscape he described as "a solitude of ice and snow and newborn rocks," the latter not yet

smoothed by the elements, and still retaining the heavy scratches left by the retreating glaciers. Today, that ice has retreated even farther, leaving behind a series of inlets headed by 11 tidewater glaciers. Among them, the **Johns Hopkins, Reid, Lamplugh, Margerie,** and **Grand Pacific** are all in the bay's western arm, and are regularly approached by cruise ships. Calving activity (large chunks of ice breaking off) from these glaciers is the big draw (Johns Hopkins has so much that ships can seldom approach closer than 2 miles, though it feels a lot closer), but don't forget to look at the land, which is a kind of living time-lapse photograph of earth's life cycles. Trees grow thick near the bay's head, but as you penetrate farther and farther, you'll see less and less vegetation, and finally none at all. It just hasn't had time to grow back yet.

Glacier Bay was named a national park in 1925, and today each ship that enters takes aboard a park ranger to provide information about glaciers and wildlife (which includes mountain goats, brown bears, minke, orca, and humpback whales) and the history of Native peoples and white men in the bay. On large ships, the ranger will speak over the PA system and may also give a presentation about conservation in the show lounge; on small ships, he or she will often be on deck throughout the day, speaking over the PA and/or just talking with the passengers and answering questions.

HUBBARD GLACIER

Hubbard lies at the northern end of **Yakutat Bay** and has two claims to fame: It's the largest tidewater glacier on the North American continent (with Alaska's widest ice face, at about 6 miles across), and it's one of the fastest-moving glaciers in Alaska. In the mid-1980s it moved so fast that it created a wall across the mouth of **Russell Fjord,** one of the inlets lining Yakutat Bay. That effectively turned the fjord into a lake and trapped hundreds of migratory marine creatures inside. After causing such a hubbub, it receded to its original position several months later. It's still an active mother, calving off a substantial amount of ice.

TRACY ARM & ENDICOTT ARM

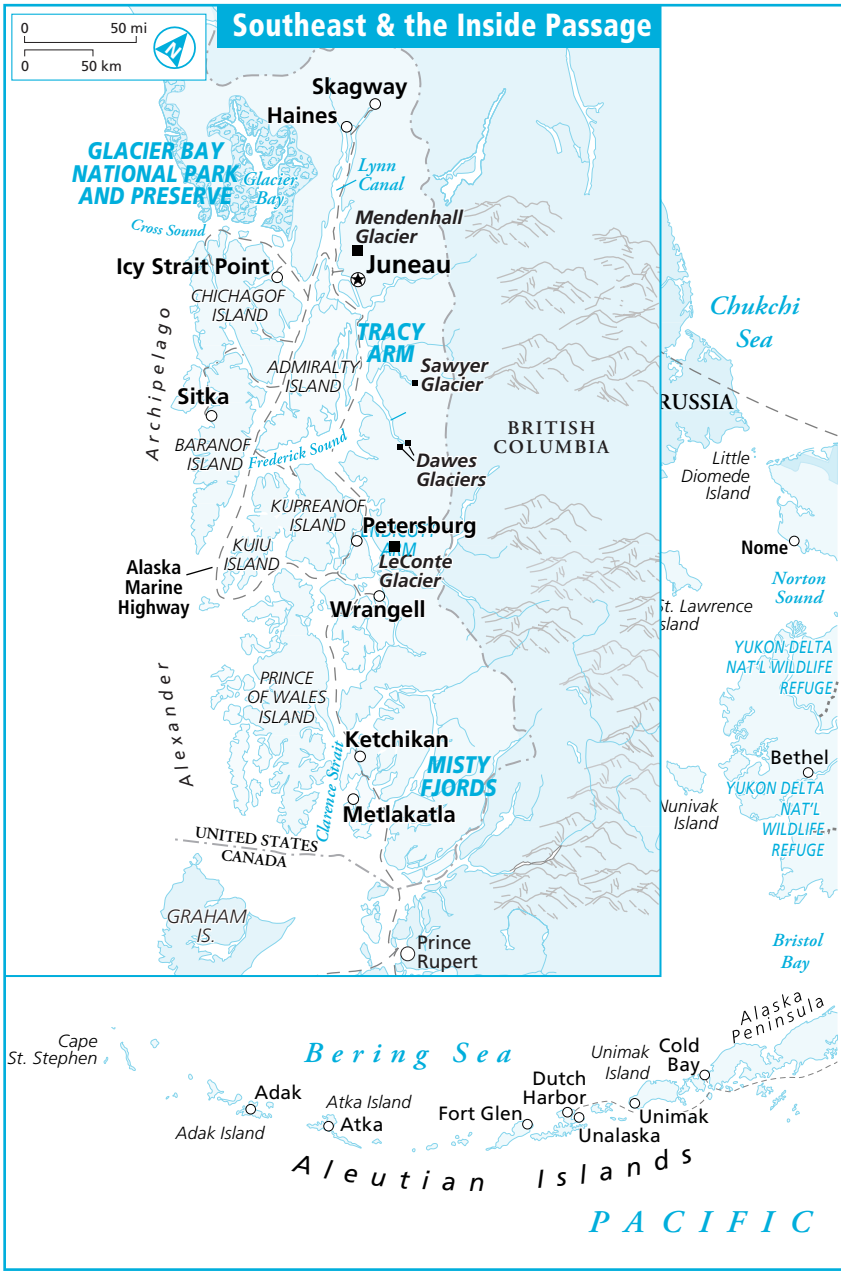
Located about 50 miles due south of Juneau, these long, deep fjords reach back from the Stephens Passage stretch of the Inside Passage into the Coastal Mountain Range, their steep-sided waterways ending in active glaciers—the **North Sawyer** and **South Sawyer Glaciers** in Tracy Arm and **Dawes Glacier** in Endicott. All of them calve constantly, filling the waters with miles of brash ice and bergs that ping and thunk off your ship's hull as you approach the ice faces. The show can be pretty spectacular. Two years ago, we saw South Sawyer calve off a sheet of ice as big as our ship. Granted, we were on one of Cruise West's small 100-passenger vessels, but still . . . .

The passage through either fjord is incredibly dramatic, the sheer mountain walls rising a mile straight from the water, cut by cascading waterfalls and tree-covered, snow-topped mountain valleys. Wildlife here might include Sitka black-tailed deer, bald eagles, mountain goats, and harbor seals (which often haul themselves out on ice floes to get some sun). You may also see a black bear. We once looked all day without luck, then, at dinner, our friend Cindy looked up from her plate of salmon and spotted one on shore, eating a salmon of its own.

MISTY FJORDS NATIONAL MONUMENT

The 2.3-million-acre, Connecticut-size area of Misty Fjords starts at the Canadian border in the south and runs on the eastern side of the Behm Canal, which has Revillagigedo Island on the other side. (Ketchikan is on the western coast of Revillagigedo.) It's the topography, not the wildlife, that makes a visit here worthwhile, with volcanic

Alaska


Southeast & the Inside Passage
0 50 mi
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Skagway
Haines
GLACIER BAY NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE
Glacier Bay
Lynn Canal
Cross Sound
Mendenhall Glacier
Juneau
Icy Strait Point
CHICHAGOF ISLAND
Archipelago
TRACY ARM
ADMIRALTY ISLAND
Sawyer Glacier
Sitka
BARANOF ISLAND
Frederick Sound
BRITISH COLUMBIA
Dawes Glaciers
KUPREANOF ISLAND
Petersburg
LeConte Glacier
KUIU ISLAND
Alaska Marine Highway
Wrangell
PRINCE OF WALES ISLAND
Alexander
Ketchikan
MISTY FJORDS
Clarence Strait
Metlakatla
UNITED STATES
CANADA
GRAHAM IS.
Prince Rupert
Chukchi Sea
RUSSIA
Little Diomede Island
Nome
Norton Sound
St. Lawrence Island
YUKON DELTA NAT'L WILDLIFE REFUGE
Bethel
Nunivak Island
Bristol Bay
Alaska Peninsula
Cape St. Stephen
Bering Sea
Adak
Adak Island
Atka Island
Atka
Fort Glen
Dutch Harbor
Unimak Island
Cold Bay
Unimak
Unalaska
Aleutian Islands
PACIFIC

Paved Road
1 State or Provincial Route
Dirt Road
ARCTIC OCEAN
Barrow
Prudhoe Bay
Beaufort Sea
Deadhorse
CAPE KRUSENSTERN NAT'L MON.
Brooks Range
Dalton Hwy.
ARCTIC NAT'L WILDLIFE REFUGE
UNITED STATES
CANADA
NOATAK NAT'L PRESERVE
Anaktuvuk Pass
KOBUK VALLEY NAT'L PARK
Kotzebue
GATES OF THE ARCTIC NAT'L PARK AND PRESERVE
Brooks Range
8
NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES
Arctic Circle
BERING LAND BRIDGE NAT'L PRESERVE
Bettles
Fort Yukon
YUKON FLATS NAT'L WILDLIFE REFUGE
Dempster Hwy.
5
C A N A D A
Chena
Circle
Galena
Manley Hot Springs
Hot Springs
6
YUKON-CHARLEY RIVERS NAT'L PRESERVE
Unalakleet
2
Fairbanks
Eagle
Nenana
North Pole
5
Y U K O N
DENALI NAT'L PARK
Delta Junction
Dawson City
Yukon River
McGrath
Mt. McKinley
Alaska Range
Tok
9
8
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Kuskokwim River
3
4
1
4
Talkeetna
Glennallen
Willow
1
Wrangell Mts.
2
Wasilla
Palmer
10
McCarthy
1
Whitehorse
4
LAKE CLARK NAT'L PARK AND PRESERVE
Anchorage
Valdez
Kenai
Soldotna
Whittier
Cordova
1
WRANGELL–ST. ELIAS NAT'L PARK AND PRESERVE
7
Dillingham
1
Seward
Homer
Prince William Sound
Cook Inlet
King Salmon
Halibut Cove
Seldovia
KENAI FJORDS NAT'L PARK
Yakutat & Hubbard Glacier
BRITISH COLUMBIA
KATMAI NAT'L PARK AND PRESERVE
Alaska Marine Highway
Juneau
Kodiak
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Glaciers: An Intro to the Ice

Along with whales, glaciers are the big drawing card on Alaska cruises, and with good reason: They're truly awesome. To see one spread between the bulk of massive mountains, flowing down into the sea, is to quite literally see how our world came to be. As the naturalist John Muir wrote while standing near an Alaskan glacier in the late 19th century: "Standing here with facts so fresh and telling and held up so vividly before us . . . one learns that the world, though made, is yet being made; that this is still the morning of creation."

HOW GLACIERS FORM Glaciers form when snow accumulates over time at high altitudes. Successive snowfalls add more and more weight, compacting the snow underneath into extremely dense **glacial ice.** As the accumulation assumes mass, forming what is known as an **ice field,** gravity takes over and the ice field begins to flow very slowly downhill through the lowest, easiest passage. The glacier's enormous mass sculpts the landscape as it goes, grinding the shale and other rock and pushing rubble and silt ahead and to the sides. This sediment is known as **moraine.** *Terminal moraine* is the accumulation of rubble at the front of a glacier; *lateral moraine* lines the sides of glaciers. A dark area in a glacier's center—seen when two glaciers flow together, pushing their ice and crushed rubble together—is *median moraine.*

TYPES OF GLACIERS Glaciers come in several different varieties. **Tidewater glaciers** are the kind most often seen on postcards; they spill down out of the mountains and run all the way to the sea. **Piedmont glaciers** are two glaciers that have run together into one. When seen from above, piedmonts resemble a highway interchange, edged by road slush, with the median moraine looking like lane dividers. There are also mountain or **alpine glaciers,** which are confined by surrounding mountain terrain and unable to flow. Other types—such as *hanging glaciers* that spill over rounded hillsides, *valley glaciers* that are confined by valley walls, and *cirque glaciers* that sit in basins and are usually circular (as opposed to river shaped)—are essentially variants on these three main varieties.

GLACIAL BEHAVIOR Glaciers are essentially rivers of ice that flow continually downhill. When they reach the sea, the effects of water and gravity cause **calving,** a phenomenon where large chunks of their ice face break off from the mass and crash into the sea, producing a sound like two 1,000-foot bowling balls colliding. The ice that's calved off floats away as an **iceberg.** Calvings are always a high point on a cruise.

Depending on temperature and the rate of precipitation, glaciers may either **advance** or **retreat.** Think of glaciers as human bodies and snowfall as calories—when the accumulation of snowfall (and resultant glacial ice) is

greater than the amount of ice lost to melting and calving, the glacier grows, which is known as *advancing.* When the opposite occurs—when melting and calving outpace new buildup of ice—the glacier is said to be *retreating.* Glaciers can also be in a state of equilibrium, where the amount of snowfall roughly equals the amount of melt-off. Even where this is the case, the glacier is still a slow-moving river, always flowing downhill—it's just that its total length remains the same, with new ice replacing old at a more or less constant rate.

In recent years, **global warming** has begun to have a noticeable effect on Alaska's glaciers. All over the state—and in other northern lands such as Greenland and the Canadian Arctic—temperatures have risen three to five times more than the global average, causing glaciers, sea ice, and permafrost to melt. Juneau's popular Mendenhall Glacier, for instance, lost 656 feet of its ice in 2004 and another 269 feet in 2005, and scientists project that it will recede away from Mendenhall Lake in little more than 10 years, retreating farther and farther into the mountains. Without dramatic action on climate change, the great glaciers could disappear forever.

AN ICEBERG BY ANY OTHER NAME When a glacier calves, the icebergs it forms are classified differently depending on their size, a system that allows one ship's captain to warn another of the relative ice hazard. Very large chunks are officially called **icebergs;** pieces of moderate size (usually 7–15 ft. across) are known as **bergy bits; growlers** are slightly smaller still, at less than 7 feet across, with less than 3 feet showing above water; and **brash ice** consists of any random smaller chunks. And remember the adage: What you're seeing is only the tip—most of the berg is below the water.

By the way, glacial ice isn't blue. It may look blue—and a startling, electric blue at that—but it's really a trick of the light. The ice absorbs all colors of the spectrum *except* blue, which is then reflected away, making the ice itself appear to be blue.

THE VIEW FROM ABOVE While glaciers are impressive enough from the water, it takes a **glacier flightseeing trip** to really drive home how completely stupendous they are, stretching away into the mountains as far as the eye can see. It's literally like getting a glimpse back into the ice age. The trips are expensive, yes, but definitely worth it. On many trips, your helicopter flightseeing will be combined with time spent down on the glacial ice, where you'll have a chance to walk around on the surface. It's like being on Mars.

If you want to explore glaciers further, the National Snow and Ice Data Center has a great glacier website, with many photos, a glossary, and other data, at **www.nsidc.org/glaciers**.

Cruisetours—'Cause All Alaska Ain't on Water

Most folks who go to the trouble of getting to a place as far off the beaten path as Alaska try to stick around for a while once they've arrived. Knowing this, the cruise lines have set up in the land-tour business as well, offering a number of land-based extensions that can be tacked on to your cruise experience, either before you sail or after.

ANCHORAGE-DENALI-FAIRBANKS The most popular cruisetour is an Anchorage-Denali-Fairbanks package consisting of a 7-night Vancouver-Anchorage cruise, followed by 2 nights in Anchorage and a scenic ride in a private railcar into **Denali National Park** for 2 more nights at one of the cruise line's lodges. A full day in the park allows guests to view the staggeringly beautiful wilderness expanse and its wildlife. If you're lucky, the gods will part the clouds to give you a look at **Mount McKinley,** North America's highest peak at 20,320 feet. From there, you'll go by train to **Fairbanks,** spending 2 more days. Fairbanks itself isn't much to look at, but the activities in outlying areas are fantastic, including paddle-wheel day cruises on the Chena and Tanana rivers, jet-boat rides, and excursions to gold mines and dredges. Passengers typically fly home from Fairbanks. A shorter variation of that itinerary might skip Fairbanks and return to Anchorage for departure. Princess's cruisetours bypass Anchorage on the way north, giving more time in the interior.

YUKON TERRITORY Tours into Canada's Yukon Territory typically combine a 3- or 4-day cruise between Vancouver and Juneau/Skagway with a land program into the Klondike. En route, passengers travel by rail, riverboat, motorcoach, and possibly air. Tours typically include overnight stops in

cliffs rising up to 3,150 feet and plunging hundreds of feet below the waterline, a reminder that you're sailing in a flooded cleft between mountains. Peace and serenity are the stock in trade of the place, with its namesake mists imparting a storybook, *Lord of the Rings* kind of atmosphere, abetted by dense hemlock and spruce forests, high ridges covered in alpine grass, and the occasional petrified lava flow reaching toward the shoreline.

Only passengers on small ships will see Misty Fjords close up, as its waterway is too narrow in most places for big ships. The bigger ships pass the southern tip of the area, and then veer away northwest to dock at Ketchikan, where shore excursions can take you back into the area by **floatplane.** Some fly in, do a water landing, and then fly out again. Others fly you to an excursion boat for exploration of the monument, and then make the short cruise back to Ketchikan.

PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND & COLLEGE FJORD

Located directly south of Anchorage on the bottom side of the Kenai Peninsula, Prince William Sound suffered mightily following the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in 1989, which killed innumerable marine creatures and birds. Today, following 2 decades of

Whitehorse, the territorial capital, and **Dawson City,** a remote, picture-perfect gold-rush town, then cross the Alaska border near Beaver Creek, travel to Fairbanks, and from there go through Denali to Anchorage. The tour can be taken in either direction.

CANADIAN ROCKIES A Canadian Rockies cruisetour allows glimpses of some of the finest mountain scenery on earth. The glacier-carved mountains are astonishingly dramatic and beautiful, and there are hundreds and hundreds of miles of this wonderful wilderness high country. Between them, **Banff National Park** and **Jasper National Park** preserve much of this mountain beauty. Other national and provincial parks make accessible other vast and equally spectacular regions of the Rockies, as well as portions of the nearby Columbia and Selkirk mountain ranges. The beautiful **Lake Louise,** colored deep green from its mineral content, is situated 35 miles north of Banff.

KENAI PENINSULA The Kenai Peninsula, just across a narrow channel from Anchorage, has long been known as the city's natural playground, packed with opportunities for fishing, hiking, sightseeing, kayaking, and wildlife-watching. Cruisetours to the area are typically 2-night add-ons to a regular Denali-Fairbanks route, though Holland America (one of the leaders in the cruisetour market) offers a dedicated 13-night Kenai-centric trip, with nights spent in Homer, Cooper Landing, and Anchorage either before or after your 7-night cruise.

Other cruisetour options include an add-on to **Wrangell–St. Elias National Park,** east of Anchorage.

cleanup, the area is on the rebound, with whales, harbor seals, eagles, sea lions, sea otters, puffins, and fish all returned to its waters. It's truly one of Alaska's most appealing wilderness areas, surrounded on three sides by the Chugach Mountains and only sparsely populated by humans, most of them congregated in a few isolated towns such as Valdez, Whittier, Cordova, and the Native villages of Tatitlek and Chenega.

College Fjord is in the northern sector of Prince William Sound, roughly midway between Whittier and Valdez. It's not one of the more spectacular Alaska glacier areas, being very much overshadowed by Glacier Bay, Yakutat Bay (for Hubbard Glacier), and others, but it's scenic enough to merit a place on a lot of cruise itineraries, mostly for **Harvard Glacier,** which sits at its head. The fjord was named by members of the 1899 Harriman Expedition, which saddled the glaciers lining College Fjord and neighboring Harriman Fjord with the names of prominent eastern schools—hence Harvard, Vassar, Williams, Yale, and so on. Perhaps the most spectacular of the sound's ice faces is **Columbia Glacier,** whose surface spreads over more than 400 square miles and whose tidewater frontage is nearly 6 miles across. Columbia is receding faster than most of its Alaska counterparts. Scientists say it will retreat more than 20 miles in the next 20 to 50 years, adding another deep fjord to Prince William Sound's collection.

2 Haines

Sitting near the northern end of the Lynn Canal, Haines (pop. 2,500) is a small, laid-back Alaska town, without the kind of self-referential tourist gloss that's so evident in neighboring Skagway, about 15 miles farther upwater. Despite the town's dramatic setting amid the peaks of the Fairweather Mountain Range, few ships come here, partly because of a shortage of large, deepwater docks, partly because of a shortage of large, obvious attractions. If you're sailing on a ship that does come, you'll be experiencing a town that maintains its local vibe well.

Haines was established in 1879 by Presbyterian missionary S. Hall Young and naturalist John Muir as a place to convert the Chilkoot and Chilkat Tlingit tribes to Christianity. They named it for Mrs. F. E. Haines, secretary of the Presbyterian National Committee, who had raised the funds for their explorations. The Tlingits called the place *Dei-Shu,* or "end of the trail," while traders knew it as Chilkoot. The U.S. military arrived in the early part of the 20th century and constructed **Fort William H. Seward,** a very 19th-century-looking group of white clapboard structures arranged around a rectangular parade ground. The fort was decommissioned after World War II, and today its structures have been turned into private homes, B&Bs, and arts and performances spaces, some of them devoted to Native culture (see "On Your Own: Within Walking Distance," below). A re-created Tlingit tribal house sits at the center of the parade ground.

Ships that don't stop in Haines regularly provide excursions to the town from Skagway, traveling by boat. Some are simple tours of town attractions (cost: $85–$99); others combine a quick tour of town with a float or jet-boat ride through the **Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve** (see below; the cost of these trips from Skagway is typically around $189) or **kayaking** in the waters around town ($169).

COMING ASHORE Ships tie up to the **Port Chilkoot Dock,** directly opposite Fort Seward and a half mile from downtown. Visitor information is available at the dock.

GETTING AROUND It's easy to explore Fort Seward and the town on foot, or you can rent a bike at **Sockeye Cycle,** 24 Portage St. in Fort Seward, just uphill from the dock (✆ **877/292-4154** or 907/766-2869; www.cyclealaska.com). Rentals cost $14 for 2 hours, $25 for 4 hours, or $35 for 8 hours, helmet and lock included. They also offer bike tours of the area.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve Float Trip ($129, 4 hr.): Head out to the Chilkat Preserve (see below) by bus, then suit up in boots and a life vest for a gentle float by rubber raft down the Chilkat River. An expert guide rows and also provides commentary on the area's natural environment, steering the raft close to shore to spot animal tracks and keeping an eye out for moose, bears, eagles, and wolves. A **jet-boat trip** ($134, 4 hr.) is also available on a different section of the river, and wildlife sightings are usually reported on these trips.

Chilkoot Lake Bicycle Adventure ($90, 3 hr.): After driving to your start point, you'll ride 8 miles along the shore of Lutak Inlet, where the river meets the sea. Highlights include some amazing views of the lake, glaciers, waterfalls, and mountains, and a chance at spotting eagles and bears.

Offbeat Haines ($49, 2 hr.): Where else but Haines can you take a tour that includes the world's one and only hammer museum (see below), a visit to an artists' studio out in Mud Bay, and a stop at a set created for the Disney film *White Fang?* The tour includes a 10-mile drive along the Chilkat River.

Remote Coastal Nature Hike ($84, 4 hr.): This 3- to 6-mile hike gets you out into the spruce and hemlock forests, wildflower meadows, and pebbly beaches surrounding Haines, with a naturalist guide to clue you in to what you're seeing. The length of the hike is based on the group's abilities, with two levels accommodating the fit and not so fit.

Valley of the Eagles Golf ($89, 3½ hr.): Outside town, along the banks of the Chilkat River, the 9-hole, par-36 Valley of the Eagles Golf Links allow you the rare opportunity of being able to say you golfed in Alaska. The course meanders through typical Alaskan landscape and affords beautiful views of the Chilkat Mountains.

Taste of Haines Tour ($69, 2 hr.): Visit the Haines Brewing Company, the smallest brewery in Alaska, for a sample and a talk with the brewmaster, then head to a local smoked-salmon shop to sample the stuff and learn how it's prepared.

Best of Haines by Classic Car ($64, 1 hr.): Explore Haines in style in a 1930s or 1940s vintage automobile. The entertaining guides share the history of the area, and you'll get an insight into how Hainesians live and make a living.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

The **Alaska Indian Arts Cultural Center,** located in the old fort hospital on the south side of the Fort Seward parade grounds (✆ **907/766-2160;** www.alaskaindianarts.com), has a small gallery selling traditional artwork and prints, plus a carvers' workshop where you may see totem carving in progress. Between the fort and the town center, the **American Bald Eagle Foundation and Natural History Museum,** Haines Highway at 2nd Avenue (✆ **907/766-3094;** www.baldeagles.org), is essentially a huge diorama representing 48,000 acres of the Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve, with more than 180 stuffed eagles and other animals. Admission is $3. The place has a real folk-art quality that's entirely appropriate for Haines. Ditto for Dave and Carol Pahl's quirkily remarkable **Hammer Museum,** 108 Main St. (✆ **907/766-2374;** www.hammermuseum.org), with more than 1,500 completely different hammers from all over the world, including whale-blubber hammers, bookbinders' hammers, little hammers used by 1920s nightclub patrons to applaud performers, Tlingit ceremonial hammers, and an 1,800-year-old Roman battle hammer. Some are displayed in action, wielded by mannequins donated by the Smithsonian Institution. Admission costs $3. Also on Main Street, down near the small-boat harbor, the small **Sheldon Museum and Cultural Center** (✆ **907/766-2366;** www.sheldonmuseum.org) was established by local shopkeepers Steve and Bess Sheldon around 1925. It has a great collection of Hainesiana: Tlingit artifacts, gold-rush-era weaponry, military memorabilia, and more. Admission is $3.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

Haines is probably the best place on earth to see bald eagles. About 20 miles outside town, the **Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve** (www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/units/eagleprv.htm) protects 48,000 acres of river bottom along the Chilkat River. Summer cruisers will miss the biggest eagle season (Oct to mid-Dec, when up to 3,000 eagles gather in the cottonwood trees, waiting to swoop down on late-spawning salmon), but a healthy

200 to 400 are in residence the rest of the year. You'll really need to take a float-trip shore excursion to see the place in the limited time you have here. The water is gentle, so much so that if your raft gets stuck, the guide will just hop out and push. Eagle sightings are practically guaranteed, and occasionally you might spot a moose along the shoreline, too.

SHOPPING

More than a dozen galleries and shops are located around Fort Seward (mostly concentrating on **Native arts**) and the downtown area.

3 Icy Strait Point

Situated on Chichagof Island about 50 miles west of Juneau and 22 miles southeast of Glacier Bay, **Icy Strait Point** (www.icystraitpoint.com) is a stop on some Princess, Celebrity, and Royal Caribbean cruises. Unlike all the other ports in this chapter, though, it's not a town; rather, it's a self-contained destination owned and managed by Tlingit Indians from the nearby village of Hoonah and designed specifically for cruise passengers. Opened to ships in 2004, the site is centered around a restored 1930s salmon cannery that now houses a museum, a 1930s cannery display, a restaurant, and shops. Principally, though, Icy Strait Point is a destination for shore excursions.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Tribal Dance & Cultural Legends ($38, 1 hr.): At the Native Heritage Center Theater, near the cannery, a group of Huna Tlingit performs traditional song, dance, and storytelling.

Whale & Marine Mammals Cruise ($144, 2½ hr.): Sail aboard a sightseeing boat through Icy Strait to Point Adolphus, one of Alaska's best whale-watching sites. An onboard naturalist discusses marine life as you scan for humpbacks and orcas, Steller sea lions, and harbor seals.

Remote Bush Exploration & Brown Bear Search ($99, 2½ hr.): Head toward the Spasski River Valley by bus, then take a short hike on gravel and boardwalk paths to viewing platforms that provide opportunities for viewing bald eagles, land otters, Sitka black-tail deer, and Alaska coastal brown bears—aka grizzlies.

Glacier Bay Flightseeing ($310, 1¾ hr.): Take off in a fixed-wing plane from Hoonah Airport and spend an hour flying above Glacier Bay, including the glaciers, waterfalls, deep crevasses, and new forests of the park, as well as the humpback whale feeding grounds of Point Adolphus.

ZipRider Adventure ($99, 1½ hr.): They claim this is the world's longest zipline, at 5,330 feet. True or not, that's still one damn long line. The tour begins with a narrated drive through Hoonah, after which you and five others are strapped into harnesses and launched down the line, accelerating up to 60mph, 300 feet above the woods.

Icy Strait Point Sport Fishing ($347, 5½ hr.): Board a cabin cruiser for a fishing excursion in Icy Strait, where five species of salmon make for some great angling. (***Note:*** A $20 fishing license and $10 king-salmon tag are extra. For an additional charge, your catch can be packed and shipped to your home.)

Halibut Fishing ($245, 3⅓ hr.): Head out into Icy Strait for a little halibut fishing. See above for licensing requirements and fees.

Hoonah Bike Tour ($67, 2 hr.): Take an 8-mile ride through Alaska's largest Tlingit village, home to about 900 residents. Along the way, your guide will discuss the town's history and present-day life.

4 Juneau

Juneau is a great town. Fronted by the busy Gastineau Channel and backed by 3,819-foot Mount Juneau and 3,576-foot Mount Roberts, its location is beyond picture perfect. But it's the city's quirks we appreciate, like the fact that it's the capital of the state but is completely surrounded by water, forest, and the massive Juneau Icefield, and is therefore unreachable by road. Or the fact that the whole town lies at the base of a landslide zone, and has numerous treeless hillsides to prove it. Or that at one time a bull terrier named Patsy Ann was the official town greeter, trotting down to the docks whenever a ship came in. (Long dead now, she's memorialized with a bronze statue in Marine Park, where the cruise ships dock.) We even appreciate the love-hate relationship the town has with the cruise industry, with many lamenting the fact that downtown and the Egan Expressway are completely overrun by visitors and tour buses from late May through September. Democracy thrives on debate, and we can't argue with the locals' concerns: On any given day, four or five cruise ships may be in port, ranging from megaships to microships. That means about 6,000 people are added daily to a population that numbers only 31,000 total—and those are spread out across the greater town's 3,255-square-mile area. It makes for a bit of chaos downtown.

Tourism woes aside, modern Juneau is a product of Alaska's golden past. It was no more than a fishing outpost for local Tlingit Indians until 1880, when gold was discovered in a creek off the Gastineau Channel by Chief Kowee of the Auk Tlingit clan. Kowee passed the information on to German engineer George Pilz in return for 100 warm blankets and a promise of work for his tribe, and agreed to lead prospectors Joe Juneau and Richard Harris to the find. Mines quickly sprang up on both sides of the channel, including the **Alaska-Juneau Mine,** known locally as the A-J, which produced a whopping 3.5 million ounces of gold before it closed in 1944. You can still see its ruins up on the slope of Mount Roberts.

Outside of town, the big attraction is **Mendenhall Glacier.** At 12 miles long and 1½ miles wide, it's the most visited glacier in the world.

COMING ASHORE Both large and small ships dock right in the downtown area, along Marine Way. Occasionally, overcrowding might mean a ship has to anchor in the channel and tender people to shore. A **visitor information center** is in a green building right on the dock, near the base of the Mount Roberts Tram. The **Patsy Ann statue** is near the head of the dock at Marine Park. Pat her head and consider yourself greeted.

GETTING AROUND Most of the in-town sites are within walking distance of the pier, though some of it is uphill. The **Juneau Trolley Car Company** (✆ **907/586-7433;** www.juneautrolley.com) also provides narrated tours of the downtown area. You can get off and on as you like at various marked sites. Full-day fares are $19 adults, $9 kids. Visits to the Mendenhall Glacier and other sights along the Egan Expressway will require an excursion or a taxi. You'll find the latter waiting at the pier.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

The number of excursions typically offered in Juneau is fairly stupefying, but that's because a lot of mixing and matching is going on: a glacier visit paired with a salmon bake or a horseback trek, a salmon bake paired with a flightseeing adventure, or a half-dozen different helicopter/glacier options. Here are some of the best.

Mendenhall Glacier Helicopter Flightseeing & Glacier Hike ($299–$519, 2½–6½ hr.): This is one of the very best shore excursions we've ever taken. After transferring to the airport by bus, guests board helicopters for a flight that follows the flowing ice of Mendenhall Glacier high into the mountains. While glaciers are impressive enough from the water, this trip gives you an idea of how magnificent they really are. After about 20 minutes of flightseeing, your helicopter will touch down on the glacial ice, where (outfitted in special boots provided by the helicopter company) you'll have a chance to walk around on the surface. Different packages give you more or less time on the glacier. The **Helicopter Glacier Trek** ($419, 4¼ hr.) and **Extended Helicopter Glacier Trek** ($519, 6½ hr.) include 2 or 3 hours respectively of rugged hiking and climbing on the glacier surface. It's one of the most amazing shore excursions we've ever done. Some tours add additional activities, such as the **Glacier Dog-Sled Expedition** that combines a flight over the Juneau Icefield with a landing on either the Norris or the Mendenhall glacier, where you board dog sleds with an Iditarod veteran ($579, 3½ hr.).

Mendenhall Glacier & Salmon Bake ($79, 4 hr.): Three for the price of one: a visit to the Macaulay Salmon Hatchery to learn about rearing or raising salmon; a visit to Mendenhall, where you can stick to the interpretive center or get closer to the ice on one of several different trails; and an all-you-can-eat salmon bake in a rustic setting, with folk-music entertainment, the ruins of an old mine to explore, and lush rainforest all around. A less expensive option ($40, 3 hr.) visits only the hatchery and glacier, while a more expensive one ($85, 4 hr.) replaces the salmon bake with a city bus tour.

Bike & Brew Tour ($94, 4½ hr.): This bicycle tour sets off outside town along Fritz Cove Road, allowing views of picturesque Auke Bay and the Mendenhall Glacier. The 11-mile ride ends at the Alaska Brewing Company for a tour and sampling of the wares.

Mendenhall Glacier Float Trip ($129, 4 hr.): On the shore of Mendenhall Lake, you'll board 10-person rafts. An experienced oarsman will guide you from there out past icebergs and into the Mendenhall River, where you'll encounter moderate rapids and stunning views. Expect a snack of smoked salmon and reindeer sausage somewhere along the way.

Mendenhall Lake Canoe Adventure ($164, 3½ hr.): Board 12-person Native canoes, paddling out onto the lake's water while a guide shares natural history and Native stories about the surrounding scenery and wildlife. You'll pull into shore near roaring Nugget Falls, just a few yards from the glacier face.

Alaska-Gastineau Gold Mine Tour ($65, 3½ hr.): Just south of town, the Alaska-Gastineau mine was once one of the world's richest. Today, you can don a hard hat and venture down a 360-foot mine tunnel, where experienced miners demonstrate hard-rock mining techniques and explain mine operations. Dress warm: It's cold down there.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Juneau's town center is compact and fun to walk around, but if you want to escape the crowd or get an overview (literally), take the **Mount Roberts Tramway** (✆ **888/461-8726** or 907/463-3412; www.goldbelttours.com) from the docks up to the clear air and overwhelming views at the 1,760-foot tree line. The ride takes only 6 minutes, but it's like entering another world. At the top, there's a reception center with a restaurant/bar, a gift shop (of course), and a theater showing a pretty good film about Tlingit culture, but try not to linger here too long. Instead, head outside to the network of paths that let on to really incredible views as you pass through a fascinating alpine ecosystem. If you're energetic, you can start a 6-mile round-trip to the Mount Roberts summit (at 3,819 ft.), though there are also several shorter loops. Watch your footing up here, especially if the trails are wet or covered in snow—a possibility in the shoulder seasons. Tickets are $27 for adults and $14 for children ages 6 to 12, and allow unlimited rides. Most ships offer the tram as an excursion for the same price, but we suggest waiting till you get to town and buying a ticket on your own, as it's not worth it if you arrive on an overcast day with no visibility.

Heading into town, the faux-notorious and realistically touristy **Red Dog Saloon,** 278 S. Franklin St. (✆ **907/463-3658;** www.reddogsaloon.com), stands right at the intersection where Egan Drive heads left toward Mendenhall Glacier and Franklin Street continues up into town. Through its swinging doors, you'll find a slightly contrived but still infectious frontier atmosphere, with a sawdust-covered floor, live music, and walls covered with memorabilia and messages from previous visitors. You'll also find current visitors—lots of them. Locals and less touristy tourists are more apt to hang out up the street at the **Alaskan Bar,** 167 S. Franklin St. (✆ **907/586-1000;** www.thealaskanhotel.com), a two-story Victorian barroom in an authentic gold-rush hotel. Down Egan, **The Hangar,** 2 Marine Way (✆ **907/586-5018;** www.hangaronthewharf.com), also serves a good brew, as well as decent pizza.

Continue down Egan and make a right at Whittier to get to the **Alaska State Museum,** 395 Whittier St. (✆ **907/465-2901;** www.museums.state.ak.us) and its large collection of art and artifacts. Opened as a territorial museum in 1900, it has a wildlife exhibit, artifacts of the city's mining and fisheries heritage, and a first-class collection reflecting the state's Russian history and Native cultures. Admission is $5. Not far off, at the intersection of Main and Fourth streets, the fun little **Juneau-Douglas City Museum** (✆ **907/586-3572;** www.juneau.lib.ak.us/parksrec/museum) displays artifacts and photographs from the city's pioneer and mining history and Tlingit culture, with special exhibits changing annually. The plaza in front is where the 49-star U.S. flag was first raised in 1959, when Alaska got its statehood before Hawaii. Admission is $4. About 3 blocks away, at Fifth and Gold, the tiny, octagonal **St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church** (✆ **907/586-1023;** www.stnicholasjuneau.org) was built in 1893 by local Tlingits who, under pressure to convert to Christianity, chose the only faith that allowed them to keep their own language.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

About 13 miles from downtown, at the head of Mendenhall Valley, the **Mendenhall Glacier** (✆ **907/789-0097;** www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/districts/mendenhall) glows bluish white, looming above the suburbs like an ice-age monster that missed the general extinction. Mendenhall is a truly impressive sight, with its ice face dipping down into Mendenhall Lake and calving off truck-size bergs, but it's also the most easily accessible glacier in Alaska, with great views even from the parking lot, along with a

wheelchair-accessible trail that leads to the water's edge. The land near the parking lot shows signs of the glacier's recent passage: little topsoil, stunted vegetation, and, in many places, bare rock that shows the scratch marks of the glacier's movement. It's still moving, too, and fast: Scientists predict that, due to global warming, the glacier will recede from the lake in little more than 10 years. Trails of various lengths depart from the Forest Service visitor center, the easiest being a .5-mile nature trail, the longest being two fairly steep, 3.5-mile hikes that approach each side of the glacier. The visitor center itself contains a glacier museum with excellent explanatory models, computerized displays, and ranger talks; admission is $3.

Along the Egan Expressway about 3 miles from downtown, the **Macaulay Salmon Hatchery,** 2697 Channel Dr. (✆ **877/463-2486** or 907/463-4810; www.dipac.net/visitor.htm), has a visitor center where you can watch the whole process of harvesting and fertilizing salmon eggs. The resultant offspring are later released back into the wild. Admission is $3.25 adults, $1.75 kids. If that doesn't float your boat, try the nearby **Alaskan Brewing Company,** 5429 Shaune Dr. (✆ **907/780-5866;** www.alaskanbeer.com). Located off Egan at Vanderbilt Hill Road (then right on Anka St. and right again on Shaune Dr.), they give low-key tours with a sampling of beer at the end, and their logo-wear is also pretty hip. The brewery started small in 1986 when Geoff and Marcy Larson had the idea of bringing a local gold-rush-era brew back to life. It worked, and now Alaskan Amber and several other brews are found everywhere in Alaska and most of the western U.S., and are mighty tasty, too.

SHOPPING

The shops near the dock are mostly aimed at tourists, with cheap souvenir stores mixed in with jewelry shops, but there are some good picks, including the **Raven's Journey,** 435 S. Franklin St. (✆ **907/463-4686;** www.ravensjourneygallery.com), selling Tlingit and other Northwest Indian art, and the **Decker Gallery,** 233 S. Franklin St. (✆ **907/463-5536**), selling the works of local artist Rie Muñoz. If you're in need of reading material, this is the best port to buy a book, with several decent shops downtown. If you're in need of smoked salmon (and who ain't?), **Taku Smokeries,** 550 S. Franklin St. (✆ **800/582-5122;** www.takustore.com), will ship it anywhere in the U.S.

5 Ketchikan

Ketchikan sits just north of the Canadian border and, like many border towns, it wears its mercantile heart on its sleeve. They call it "Alaska's first city" because it's the first port visited on most northbound cruises, but the way people throng the port area's gift shops, you'd think it was their last chance to use credit cards before Judgment Day. Here's our advice: Walk down the gangway, take three deep breaths, and say to yourself, "I do not need to shop." Instead, walk right past the souvenir stores and head for one of the town's several **totem-pole** parks or take an excursion to **Misty Fjords.** When you get back, you can spend some time poking around the galleries and shops on Creek Street.

Shopping aside, the town's port area is interesting in that much of it is either landfill or sitting on stilts above the water. The town is also notable for being one of the soggiest in Alaska: The average annual rainfall is about 160 inches (more than 13 ft.), and has topped 200 inches in its most intense years.

COMING ASHORE Ships dock at a pier right in downtown Ketchikan.

GETTING AROUND Ketchikan's downtown port area is completely flat and walkable. Taxis are available at the pier if you want to go out to Totem Bight Park on your own.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Misty Fjords Flightseeing ($259–$365, 2–4½ hr.): Everyone gets a window seat aboard the floatplanes that run these flightseeing jaunts over mysterious, primordial Misty Fjords National Monument (see "Cruising Alaska's Natural Wonders," p. 584). The less expensive planes tool around, make a water landing so you can step out onto the pontoon, and then return to Ketchikan by air. The more expensive (and better) floatplane transfers you to a tour boat after landing at the monument, allowing you to see more of it from sea level. The boat takes you back to Ketchikan at the end.

Saxman Native Village Tour ($59, 2½ hr.): This Native village, about 2½ miles outside Ketchikan, is home to hundreds of Tlingit, Tsimshian, and Haida, and is a center for the revival of Native arts and culture. The tour includes a storytelling session and a performance by the Cape Fox Dancers at the Beaver Clan House, as well as a guided walk through the grounds to see the totem poles and learn their stories. Craftspeople are sometimes on hand in the working sheds to demonstrate totem-pole carving. A short bus tour of Ketchikan is usually appended to the end of the trip.

Rainforest Wildlife Sanctuary ($85, 2½ hr.): After an 8-mile coastal drive you'll do a .5-mile hike with a naturalist guide, trying to spot eagles, bears, seals, and various birdlife. After, you'll have an opportunity to feed Alaskan reindeer, watch a totem-pole carver at work, and take a tour of a historic sawmill.

Sportfishing ($209, 5 hr.): If catching salmon is your goal, Ketchikan is a good spot to do it. Chartered fishing boats come with tackle, bait, fishing gear, and crew to help you strike king and coho around the end of June, or pink, chum, and silver from July to mid-September. ***Note:*** A $20 fishing license and $10 king-salmon tag are extra.

Tatoosh Island Sea Kayaking ($149, 4½ hr.): There are typically two kayaking excursions offered in Ketchikan: this one (which requires you to take a van and motorized boat to the islands before starting your 90-min. paddle) and a trip that starts right beside the cruise ship docks. Of the two, the former is far more enjoyable, getting you out into a wilder area rather than just sticking to the busy port waters. The scenery is incredible, and you have a good chance of spotting bald eagles, leaping salmon, and seals, which may be swimming around your boat or just basking on the rocks.

Totem Bight Historical Park & City Tour ($39, 2½ hr.): This tour takes you by bus around Ketchikan and through the Tongass National Forest to see a historic Native fish camp where a ceremonial clan house and totem poles sit amid the rainforest. A fair amount of walking is involved.

The Great Alaskan Lumberjack Show ($34, 1½ hr.): Touristy fun: Watch lumberjacks compete in logrolling, speed climbing, tree topping, chainsaw carving, and all the other skills every lumberjack needs. The amphitheater, behind Salmon Landing and just a few hundred yards from the pier, has covered grandstands to keep you from getting soggy. If you don't book this as an excursion, you can still buy tickets at the door for the same price.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Near the pier, the **Southeast Alaska Discovery Center,** 50 Main St. (✆ **907/228-6220;** www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/districts/discoverycenter), houses the best museum in the region for illustrating the interaction of the region's ecology and human society, both Native and white. An auditorium shows a high-tech slide show, and there are also information desks and a good bookstore. Admission to the exhibits is $5.

The centerpiece of downtown Ketchikan is **Creek Street,** a row of quaint wooden houses built on pilings above a busy salmon stream. Today, the narrow, boardwalked street is filled mainly with boutiques, funky restaurants, and galleries specializing in offbeat pieces by local artists, but back in the days, it was Ketchikan's notorious and semicondoned red-light district, with more than 30 brothels lining the waterway. That all came to an end in the mid-1950s, and today all that's left is the touristy **Dolly's House museum,** 24 Creek St. (✆ **907/225-6329**), once the establishment of a madam who worked under the name Dolly Arthur. Like the house's old clientele, you have to pay to get inside. We don't know what the old patrons had to shell out, but today it'll cost you $5. At the end of Creek Street, a **funicular** takes you uphill to the West Coast Cape Fox Lodge, which has nice views. Walk through the lobby and back outside, then follow the signs to the **Married Men's Trail,** allegedly a route taken by local men to reach the "spawning grounds" below. It makes for a nice little hike back into town.

Near its bottom, the Married Men's Trail branches off, left to Creek Street and right to Park Avenue. At Park, an observation deck above the artificial **salmon ladder** lets you watch the determined fish battle the water's current to their spawning grounds at the top of Ketchikan Creek. Walk about ⅓ mile up Park Avenue and make a right at Herring Way to reach the indoor **Totem Heritage Center,** 601 Deermount St. (✆ **907/225-5900;** www.city.ketchikan.ak.us/departments/museums/totem.html), built by the city in 1976 to house a fine collection of 33 original totem poles from the 19th century, retrieved from the Tlingit Indian villages of Tongass and Village Islands and the Haida village of Old Kasaan. The Tsimshian people are also represented in some exhibits. The poles have not been restored, and are displayed mostly unpainted, many with the grass and moss still attached from when they were rescued from the elements. Totem poles were never meant to be maintained or repainted—they generally disintegrate after about 70 years, and were constantly replaced—but these were preserved to help keep the culture alive. A high ceiling and muted lighting highlight the spirituality of the art. Well-trained guides are on hand to explain what you're looking at, and there are good interpretive signs, as well as authentic Native crafts for sale. Admission is $5. Across the creek, the **Deer Mountain Tribal Hatchery and Eagle Center,** 1158 Salmon Rd. (✆ **907/228-5278;** www.kictribe.org), raises and releases young salmon to supplement the natural runs. You can view them in holding pools and learn about their lifecycle, then wander over to the huge outdoor cages, home to injured eagles that were nursed back to health and are unable to return to the wild. Admission is $9, free for kids 12 and under.

Okay, now you can go shopping.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

About 10 miles outside town, **Totem Bight State Historical Park,** 9883 N. Tongass Hwy. (✆ **907/247-8574;** www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/units/totembgh.htm), presents poles and a clan house carved beginning in 1938. Working under the New Deal's Civilian Conservation Corps, Native craftsmen used traditional tools to copy

fragments of historic poles that had mostly rotted away, thereby helping to preserve an aspect of Tlingit and Haida culture that had essentially been outlawed until that time. The setting, purportedly the site of a traditional fishing camp, is a peaceful spot at the end of a short walk through the woods. Admission is free.

SHOPPING

You'll wonder whether the town should be renamed "Kitschikan" if you spend much time in the many souvenir stores that line Front Street and the rest of the port area, but there are a few decent shops among them. Our favorites are all on **Creek Street,** which has galleries, kitchenware shops (moose-shaped cookie molds!), bookshops, and other appealing places to drop some change.

6 Sitka

Geographically speaking, Sitka is not on the Inside Passage at all, but rather on the Pacific coast of Baranof Island, sheltered by a fringe of islands at the head of Sitka Sound. Its name, in fact, comes from the Tlingit *Shee Atika,* which means "people on the outside of Shee." Small ships can thread in through narrow Peril Strait, which separates Baranof and Chichagof islands, but the big cruise ships have to sail around Baranof into the open Pacific. This minor inconvenience—and the fact that Sitka lacks docking facilities for megaships, which must send passengers ashore in tenders—means the town has fewer cruise ship visits than Juneau, Ketchikan, and Skagway. Because of this, it retains a more residential feel than similar-size towns in Southeast, and its combination of location, multicultural heritage, a mixed economy, and sheer local pride keep it just plain beautiful to look at. Remarkably, little has changed since the old days: Historic photographs bear an uncanny resemblance to today's city.

Sitka's history is by far Alaska's richest. The powerful and sophisticated Kiksadi Tlingit clan called this part of Baranof Island home for centuries. In 1799, however, they came face to face with European power when Alexander Baranof, manager of the fur-trading Russian-American Company, established a new fort here in order to expand its sea otter hunting operations and territorial claims. Faced with the prospect of subjugation, the Tlingit attacked the Russian's redoubt in 1802 and killed almost everyone inside. Two years later, Baranof returned with reinforcements, forcing the tribe to make way for the new colonial city of Novoarkhangelsk (New Archangel). Today, Sitka preserves the Russian buildings of Alaska's earliest white settlement and, more deeply, the story of the cultural conflict between Alaska Natives and the invaders, and their resistance and ultimate accommodation to the new ways.

COMING ASHORE Most passengers will arrive in Sitka by tender because the harbor is too small to accommodate large ships. Tenders drop you right in the downtown area, where small ships can also dock. Maps are available at the volunteer-staffed visitor information desk in the Crescent Harbor Dock's **Harrigan Centennial Hall,** which also houses the Isabel Miller Museum and the auditorium where the New Archangel Dancers perform (see below). The other docking facility is at the nearby O'Connell Bridge, where maps can be picked up from the information kiosk. Map boards are found near both docking facilities. At press time, the town was debating whether to build a new cruise ship pier at the Sawmill Cove Industrial Park, which would allow large vessels to dock.

GETTING AROUND Unless you have mobility problems, we recommend walking in this town. You can hoof it to everything there is to see, and it's a beautiful place

to explore. The **Visitor Transit Shuttle bus** also makes a circuit of the town's attractions throughout the day whenever large ships are in town, meeting arrivals at the docks and stopping at the Sheldon Jackson Museum, the Historical Park, the Alaska Raptor Center, the Tribal Community House, and downtown. An all-day pass costs $10.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

We advise against shore excursions here. The town is lovely enough by itself, and the various attractions have very good interpretive programs. If, however, you want something organized or want to get out in the wilds, here are a few options.

Sea Otter and Wildlife Quest ($128, 3 hr.): Cruise in a water-jet-driven tour boat while a naturalist leads the search for sea otters, whales, sea lions, porpoise, harbor seals, brown bears, blacktail deer, bald eagles, and a variety of marine birds.

Russian America Tour ($49, 2½ hr.): Tour Sitka on foot and by coach, visiting the Russian Cemetery, Castle Hill, the Russian Blockhouse, Sitka National Historical Park, and St. Michael's Russian Orthodox Cathedral. Later, take in a performance of Russian folk dances by the New Archangel Dancers (see below). The **Russian America & Raptor Center Tour** ($59, 4 hr.) also includes a visit to the Raptor Rehabilitation Center.

Sitka Bike & Hike ($83, 3 hr.): After transferring to Sawmill Creek, you'll ride 4 miles and then hike approximately 1 mile in the Tongass National Forest before being brought back to the docking area. The **Advanced Bike Adventure** ($105, 4 hr.) is designed for experienced riders, covering 22 miles along the coast, with an elevation gain of 1,000 feet. It includes a visit to the Medvejie Fish Hatchery or a .5-mile hike to Beaver Lake. Lunch is included.

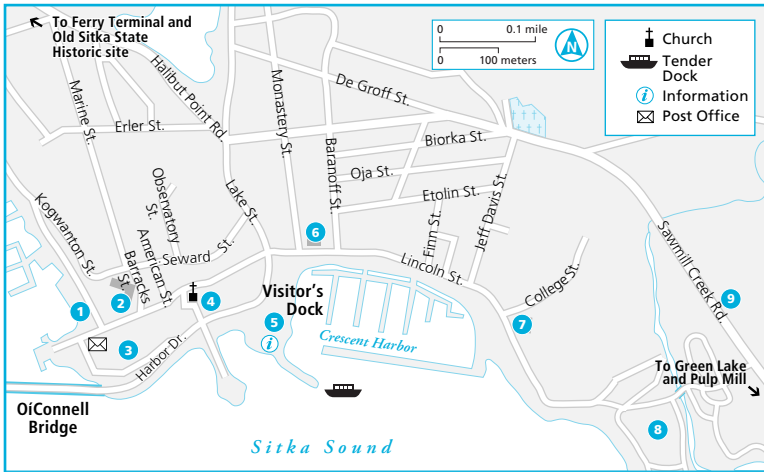
Sportfishing ($230, 4 hr.): An experienced captain will guide your fully equipped boat to a good spot for halibut and salmon; the rest is up to you. Your catch can be frozen or smoked and, if you wish, shipped to your home. ***Note:*** A $20 fishing license and a $10 king-salmon tag are extra.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Essentially, everything in Sitka is within walking distance, though the farthest attraction, the Alaska Raptor Center (see below), might prove too much of a hike for some.

St. Michael's Cathedral, with its striking onion-shaped dome and its ornate gilt interior, is on Lincoln Street, at the focal point of the downtown thoroughfare. One of the 49th state's most striking and oft-photographed structures, the current church is actually a replica of the 1840s original, which burned to the ground one night in 1966. So revered was the cathedral that Sitkans, whether Russian Orthodox or not, formed a human chain and carried many of the cathedral's precious icons, paintings, vestments, and jeweled crowns from the flames. St. Michael's was later re-created on the same site, from the same plans, and was rededicated in 1976. It still houses those religious symbols that the citizens worked so hard to rescue from the inferno, and is the official seat of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska. The vast majority of the church's congregation is made up of Alaska Native peoples, who were evangelized by the original cathedral's designer, Bishop Innocent Veniaminov, in the 19th century. Admission is $2.

Innocent's 1842 home, straightforwardly called the **Russian Bishop's House** (✆ **907/747-0110;** www.nps.gov/sitk), is a fascinating place a few blocks east at Lincoln and Monastery streets. It is now operated by the National Park Service, which



Alaska Raptor Center **9**
Castle Hill **3**
Harrigan Centennial Hall **5**
Isabel Miller Museum **5**
New Archangel Dancers **5**
Russian Bishop's House **6**
Sheetka'Kwaan Naa Kahidi Building **1**
Sheldon Jackson Museum **7**
Sitka National Historical Park **8**
Sitka Pioneers Home **2**
St. Michael's Cathedral **4**

provides surprisingly enjoyable and informative tours of the bishop's furnished quarters and an impressive chapel. Born in 1797 in a remote Siberian village, Innocent first traveled to Alaska as a missionary in 1824, and was named the territory's first resident bishop in 1840. A giant for his time at 6 feet 3 inches, he was also something of a Renaissance man, accomplished in architecture, carpentry (he built several of the pieces on display), ethnography, clockmaking, and linguistics. During his service, he became fluent in Tlingit and Aleut, and translated liturgical texts and his own spiritual treatises into these languages by adapting the Russian Cyrillic alphabet. Exhibits downstairs trace Sitka's history. Admission costs $4.

A little farther down Lincoln, you'll see the campus of Sheldon Jackson College, founded by its namesake Presbyterian missionary in 1878 as a vocational school for young Tlingits. The **Sheldon Jackson Museum** (✆ **907/747-8981;** www.museums.state.ak.us), located on the grounds, contains a fine collection of Native artifacts, including Tlingit, Aleut, Athabascan, Haida, and Tsimshian peoples, as well as the Native peoples of the Arctic. The core of the collection was assembled by Jackson himself on his travels around the territory. Admission is $4.

Continue down Lincoln until you come to the **Sitka National Historical Park** (✆ **907/747-0110;** www.nps.gov/sitk). This is where the Tlingit made their stand

against Russia in 1804, holding off imperial gunboats and Aleut mercenaries for 6 days before finally melting away one night after taking heavy losses. The land was officially protected starting in 1890, and in 1910 the site was designated a National Historic Park, emphasizing the Native perspective. In the visitor center, exhibits explain the history and the art of totem carving, with 19th-century poles displayed in one hall and new ones created in the on-site Southeast Alaska Indian Cultural Center, which also has windowed workshops devoted to traditional crafts of metal, wood, beads, textiles, and woven grass. Outside, a **rainforest trail** winds along the coast of the 113-acre park past a collection of towering totems nestled among the spruce and hemlock. The **battle site**—just a grassy area now—is also along the trail, but among the trees and totems, with the sound of the lapping sea and raven's call, you can feel deep down what the Tlingits were fighting for. Admission costs $4.

Beyond here, just across Indian River, the **Alaska Raptor Center,** 1101 Sawmill Creek Rd. (✆ **800/643-9425;** www.alaskaraptor.org), is just on the border between "within walking distance" and not. A nonprofit venture supported by tour companies, cruise lines, and public donations, the center was opened in 1980 to treat sick or injured birds of prey (primarily eagles), and to provide an educational experience for visitors. Birds that cannot be returned to the wild are sent to zoos or housed here permanently, providing guests the rare experience of standing just a few feet from a huge, unblinking eagle. The flight center allows an exciting view of the eagles training just prior to release. Admission costs $12 adults, $6 kids 12 and under.

Back in the center of town are several worthwhile sites. **Castle Hill,** up the stairs near the intersection of Lincoln and Katlian streets, was where the first U.S. flag was raised on Alaskan soil, after the U.S. and Russia held a transfer ceremony here in 1867. You get a great panoramic view of town from the top. Across the street, the beautiful building behind the big bronze statue is the **Sitka Pioneers Home,** a state retirement home. Next to the Pioneers Home, the **Sheetka'Kwaan Naa Kahidi Building,** 200 Katlian St. (✆ **888/270-8687;** www.sitkatours.com/dance.html), is a modern version of a traditional Tlingit tribal house. It hosts regular performances of traditional Tlingit dance, often coinciding with cruise ship visits. Show times are posted here and at the Centennial Hall. Behind the stage is the largest handcarved wooden screen in Southeast Alaska, depicting Eagle and Raven, the two principal clans of the Tlingit people. Thirty-minute dance performances cost $8 adults, $5 kids.

Next to the Crescent Harbor Dock, the **Isabel Miller Museum** at the Harrigan Centennial Hall (✆ **907/747-6455;** www.sitka.org/historicalmuseum) outlines the city's history with art, artifacts, and a large diorama of Sitka as it was in 1867. Admission is free, though donations are welcome. Centennial Hall is also the home of the **New Archangel Dancers** (✆ **907/747-5516;** www.newarchangeldancers.com), an all-woman company that gives 30-minute performances of Russian and Ukrainian traditional dance on most days when cruise ships are in port. Admission is $7, and tickets must be purchased at least a half-hour before the show. The schedule is posted at the hall.

SHOPPING

There are some good shops and galleries in Sitka, mostly on Lincoln and Harbor streets, with several shops selling **Russian crafts** clustered in the neighborhood of St. Michael's Cathedral. The gift shop at the **Sheldon Jackson Museum** is an excellent place to buy authentic Alaska Native arts and crafts.

7 Skagway

Situated at the end of the picturesque Lynn Canal, Skagway served as the jumping-off point for the tidal wave of prospectors who arrived in 1897 for the short but intense **Yukon Gold Rush.** Greed is a great motivator, but not many of these fellas realized the hardships they'd have to endure before they could get close to the gold stuff, hiking some 3,000 vertical feet over 20 miles along either the **White Pass** or the **Chilkoot Pass** through the coastal mountain range to the Canadian border. By itself, that might not have been too bad, but by order of Canada's North West Mounted Police, they had to have at least a year's supply of provisions with them before they could enter the country. Numbed by wind and temperatures that fell at times to 50 below zero—Skagway's Tlingit name, *Skagua,* means "home of the North Wind"—most inched their way up, carrying some of their supplies midway then returning for more. The process often required as many as 20 trips.

The town, such as it was then, was entirely a product of the gold rush, having been established as a dock and lumber mill by former steamboat captain William Moore and his son in the 1890s, after they realized the nearby pass would be a good entry to Canada if gold were ever discovered there. They were right, but rather than enriching the Moores as intended, the rush simply brought total anarchy to Skagway, with a swarm of opportunists arriving with the prospectors to either service or swindle them—usually both. The most notorious of the Skagway bad men was Jefferson Randolph **"Soapy" Smith,** a con man and thug who knew an open town when he saw it, and effectively took the place over before getting himself shot in a now-mythic gunfight with city surveyor Frank Reid. Reid died in the fight too, and both were buried in the town's Gold Rush Cemetery—Reid inside, under a granite marker that reads "He gave his life for the honor of Skagway," and Smith under a simple marker in unconsecrated ground. As is the way of things, it's Smith whose name is all over today's Skagway, part of the town's totally Disneyesque "wild and wonton frontier town" image—about which you'll hear a lot.

Remember the actor Walter Brennan, who played the old coot in every other Hollywood Western from the '30s through the '50s? Well, every single person in Skagway seems to have gone to his acting school. Yes, people do live here (862 of them year-round, according to the 2000 census), but most of the folks you see in the summer are seasonal workers, brought in essentially as actors to man the set. It's some set, with the wide main drag, Broadway, lined end to end with gold-rush-era buildings and protected as a National Historic District. A few that look like real businesses turn out to be displays showing how it was back in frontier days, but most house gift shops—lots and lots of gift shops.

Pieces of history are preserved all around town, from cute touches such as the huge watch painted on the mountainside, advertising long-gone Kirmse's watch repair, to the monumental **White Pass and Yukon Route Railroad,** which opened in 1900 to carry late stampeders into Canada and bring gold out. It's one of the first things you'll see when coming in from the cruise ship piers. The round-trip to the summit of the pass, following a route carved out of the side of the mountain by an American/Canadian engineering team, takes 3 hours from the depot, set right at the foot of town.

COMING ASHORE Ships dock at the cruise pier, at the foot of Broadway or off Congress or Terminal Way. Though the docks are in sight of downtown, it's about a 20-minute walk, so free shuttle buses are provided.

GETTING AROUND Skagway is almost hermetically self-contained, like a theme park. The only street you really need to know about is **Broadway,** which runs through the center of town and off which everything branches. **Walking maps** describing the historic buildings and **trail maps** of the surrounding area are available at the Arctic Brotherhood Hall on Broadway between 2nd and 3rd and at the National Historic Park visitor center, located at the railroad depot. Hikes range from 1 to 10 miles, and most involve some good hill walking. The Skagway Streetcar Company also offers tours via historic period limos (see below).

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

White Pass & Yukon Route Railway ($125–$199, various durations): The sturdy engines and vintage parlor cars of this famous narrow-gauge railway take you from the town and past waterfalls and still-visible parts of the famous "Trail of '98" to the White Pass Summit, the boundary between Canada and the United States. On a clear day, you'll be able to see all the way down to the harbor, and you might see the occasional hoary marmot or other critter fleeing from the train's racket. Several variations are offered: one an up-and-back trip to the summit ($125, 3½ hr.); one that includes a bus ride to the village of Carcross near Lake Bennett, Yukon Territory, where you have lunch at the Caribou Trading Post before boarding the train for the ride back to Skagway ($199, 8 hr.); one that combines the train ride with kayaking at Bernard Lake ($225, 5 hr.); another that adds a helicopter flight over the Juneau Icefield and a 5-mile hike along the upper Skagway River to view Laughton Glacier ($399, 5 hr.); and another that adds a walking tour of the gold-rush-era ghost town of Bennett, along with a "prospector's meal" of gold miner's stew, nugget baked beans, sourdough bread, and apple pie, plus a motorcoach trip back to Skagway via the Klondike Highway ($299, 8½ hr.). Now the caveat to the whole experience: On an overcast day, you won't see a damn thing from the train. If you're on the fence, consider waiting to buy your tickets at the depot when you arrive, if there are seats available. Schedule info is available at **www.wpyr.com**.

Dyea Rainforest Bicycle Tour ($89, 3 hr.): The ghost town of Dyea, about 9 miles west, was established around the same time as Skagway, but was abandoned completely after the gold rush. On this tour, you'll start in Dyea and ride 6 miles back to Skagway through the rainforest, whose coastal tidal flats are home to eagles, salmon, and wildflowers.

Dyea on Horseback ($169, 3½ hr.): A van takes you to Dyea, where you tour the town aboard an even-tempered mount while your guide spins some history.

Sled Dog Musher's Camp ($119, 2¾ hr.): An introduction to the sled-dog life, with a tour of a musher's camp, includes a 20-minute ride through the forest aboard a wheeled sled, and a chance to cuddle husky pups.

Chilkoot Trail Hike & Float Trip ($119, 4½ hr.): From the pier, travel to the historic Dyea ghost town and hike the first 2 miles of the Chilkoot Trail through the rainforest. At the shore of the Taiya River, you'll board 18-foot rafts for a float back to Dyea.

Glacier Point Wilderness Safari ($254, 4½ hr.): A 40-minute trip by fast catamaran takes you through Alaska's deepest fjord, where you can watch for whales and sea lions en route to a remote beach at Glacier Point. After a short wobble by 4-wheel-drive schoolbus along a rough road, you'll walk a quarter mile down to the water and board

a 31-foot canoe, then paddle out into the waters around Davidson Glacier. This tour is also available from Haines.

Klondike Bicycle Tour ($89, 2½ hr.): After taking a van to the White Pass summit, you'll ride down the Klondike Highway, 15 miles from peak to sea, pausing along the way for photos.

Yukon Golf Odyssey ($179, 8 hr.): After a ride across the White Pass, you'll head into the Yukon to the town of Carcross and its 9-hole, par-36 Meadow Lakes Golf & Country Club course, with four sets of tees on each hole and lengths ranging from 1,800 yards to 2,800 yards. Golfing in the Yukon! Now there's something to tell your regular partners.

Skagway by Streetcar ($40, 2 hr.): This is as much performance art as historical tour: Guides in period costume relate tales of the boomtown days as you tour the sights both in and outside of town in a 1920s limo. Though theatrical, it's all done in a homey style, as if you're getting a tour from your cousin. The guide is as likely to point out funky oddities as major historical sites. After seeing the Historic District, the Lookout, the Gold Rush Cemetery, and other sights, guests see a little song-and-dance and film presentation about Skagway, and become honorary members of the Arctic Brotherhood. This last part is very, very hokey.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Though Skagway's historic district includes some three dozen buildings from the 1890s and early 1900s, most are either privately owned or leased by the Park Service for use as businesses. Be sure to pick up the "Skagway Walking Tour" map at the Arctic Brotherhood Hall or the National Historic Park visitor center (see "Getting Around," above) and consult it as you wander around. A little knowledge could transform that souvenir shop back into a dry goods store. Everything here is within walking distance, though the Gold Rush Cemetery (see below) might be a bit far for some. If so, skip it; it's not that interesting by itself.

As you're coming into town from the docks, via Broadway, you'll be greeted by a few interesting sights. To the right, that fiendish-looking machine near the tracks is a **rotary snowplow** that was used by the railroad whenever the White Pass tracks got snowed in. The two buildings just behind it, on the corner of 2nd and Broadway, house the offices of the **National Park Service,** with the **White Pass and Yukon Route** depot right next door. The NPS buildings are worth a stop for information and historical ambience (they once housed the original railroad depot and offices), while the latter merits a stop for its gift shop, which has some nifty railroad souvenirs.

Across the street, at the corner of 2nd Avenue, bartenders at the **Red Onion Saloon** (✆ **907/983-2414;** www.redonion1898.com) still serve drinks over the same mahogany bar they used back in gold-rush days. Waitresses wear busty dance-hall outfits, as do the double-entendre-flinging docents, who lure visitors to the former bordello upstairs for a tour—$5 for 15 minutes, just like in the old days. If you have less time, you can even get a "quickie" tour for less. It's actually interesting, with rooms recreated to look as they did in the 1890s, and a decent presentation by the guides, too.

On the same block, the **Arctic Brotherhood Hall** is mostly notable for its facade, covered in thousands of pieces of driftwood.

At the other end of town, at 7th Avenue and Spring Street, the 1899 McCabe College building houses the **Skagway Museum** (✆ **907/983-2420**), a very professional display providing a look at Skagway's history through artifacts, photographs, and

historical records. Items on display include a Tlingit canoe and Bering Sea kayaks, as well as a collection of gold-rush supplies and tools and Native American items such as baskets and beadwork. Admission is $2. If you'd like to get out of town for awhile, continue walking about a mile and a half up State Street to the old **Gold Rush Cemetery,** where Frank Reid and Soapy Smith are buried.

Back on Broadway, at 6th Avenue, the ***Days of '98 Show*** has been playing at the Fraternal Order of Eagles Hall No. 25 (✆ **907/983-2545**) since 1927, which tells you how long Skagway has relied on tourism. A melodrama of the Gay '90s featuring dancing girls, ragtime music, a recitation of Robert Service poetry, and (naturally) actors playing Smith and Reid in their historic shootout, the show is almost always part of a shore excursion, but you can also buy tickets at the door for $18. From the theater, walk down Sixth and make a right to see the historic **Moore Cabin,** built in 1887 by Skagway founder William Moore.

SHOPPING

Skagway is all about shopping, but we try to avoid it. Most of the shops sell either cheap tourist gimcracks or jewelry. The most characteristic items from town are probably railroad souvenirs from the **White Pass and Yukon Route,** available at the depot. **Heart of Broadway,** 305 Broadway, at Ninth (✆ **907/983-3773**), stocks jewelry and other work by local artists, including salmon-tooth earrings made by Nan Saldi, who has family in the local fishing business.

8 Victoria, British Columbia

Cruises that start in Seattle or San Francisco typically visit Victoria on the way north to Alaska. Located on Vancouver Island, this lovely little city is the capital of British Columbia, and appropriately so, as it's almost more British than Britain, with gorgeous Victorian architecture and lovely gardens among its main attractions. Take a tour around the island and you'll see beautiful homes, stately government buildings, and views that include the snowcapped mountains of Washington State.

COMING ASHORE Cruise ships dock at the Ogden Point cruise ship terminal on the Strait of Juan de Fuca, about a mile southwest of the **Inner Harbour** and the **Downtown/Old Town** area, where most attractions are located.

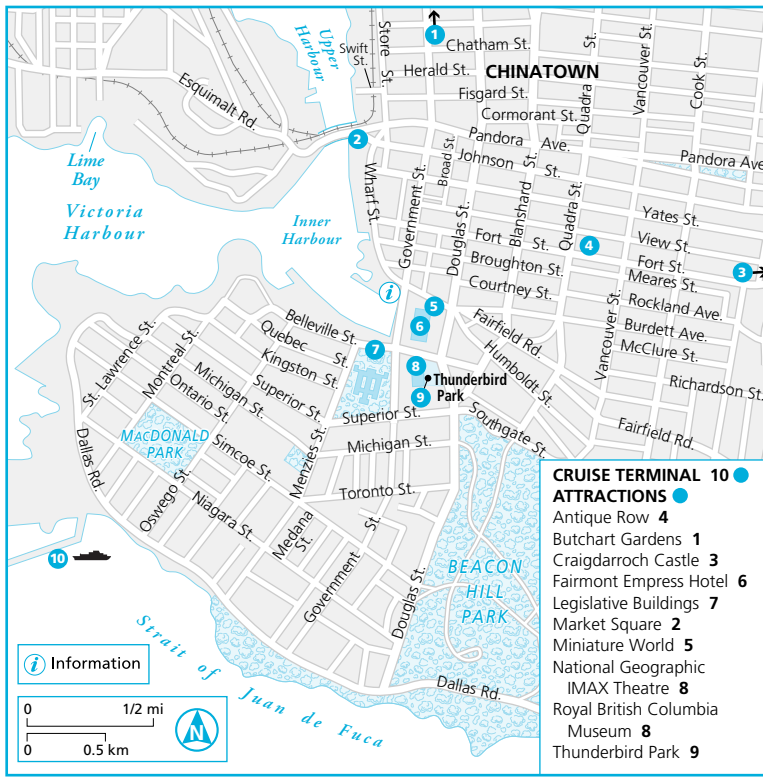
GETTING AROUND Cruise lines offer a shuttle to the Inner Harbour, where flower baskets, milling crowds, and street performers liven the scene around the grand Fairmont Empress hotel, famed setting for English-style high tea.

Note: For much of 2008, U.S. and Canadian dollars were essentially equal in value. In 2009, though, the U.S. dollar had gained in strength, with C$1 = US83¢ (another way to say the same thing: US$1 buys C$1.20). Exchange rates fluctuate, however, so prices may not be exactly the same when you arrive in port. Prices in this section are in U.S. dollars.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Butchart Gardens ($69, 3½ hr.): The world-renowned Butchart Gardens are set in a former quarry (see details below). Expanded trips include high tea at the gardens ($114, 4 hr.), or combine a visit to Craigdarroch Castle (see below) with a visit and gourmet picnic at the gardens ($179, 5 hr.).

Victoria Pub Crawl ($89, 3½ hr.): Visit three of the city's finest pubs and sample its best local brews, all without having to choose a designated driver.



Orca & Wildlife-Watching Adventure ($119, 3½ hr.): A catamaran takes you out on the waters off southern Vancouver Island, home to killer whales, seals, porpoises, and myriad birds.

Horse-Drawn Trolley Tour ($49, 1 hr.): A fully narrated tour takes you past James Bay, Beacon Hill Park, and Victoria's Old Town, which includes the Legislative Buildings and the Fairmont Empress.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

It's about a mile from the docks to the central attractions around the Inner Harbour, but let's call that walking distance, for argument's sake. Once you're there, the big attraction is the ivy-covered, grandly Edwardian **Fairmont Empress,** 721 Government St. (✆ **250/384-8111;** www.fairmont.com/empress). Built in 1908, the hotel has a grand lobby and is *the* place to go for British-style high tea. Many shore excursions include tea here; but if you plan to go on your own, call 2 weeks before your cruise for reservations, and be sure to follow the dress code: no sleeveless shirts, tank tops, short-shorts, or cutoffs. To the side of the hotel, you'll find the **Miniature World** museum (✆ **250/385-9731;** www.miniatureworld.com), with quirky displays like big dollhouses, the world's smallest working sawmill, and a model of London in 1670.

Admission is $10 adults, $8.30 youths 12 to 17, $6.75 children 5 to 11. Nearby, British Columbia's **Legislative Buildings,** 501 Belleville St. (✆ **250/387-3046;** www.leg.bc.ca), exude typical British government gravitas, their stony bulk surrounded by vast lawns and headed by a statue of the city's namesake, Queen Victoria. Visitors can watch the proceedings from upper galleries, and free tours of the buildings are held every 20 to 30 minutes in summer.

Just to the east sits the **Royal British Columbia Museum,** 675 Belleville St. (✆ **888/447-7977;** www.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca), its entrance graced by towering totem poles and other large sculptural works by Northwest First Nations artists. Inside, exhibits highlight the natural history of the province and Victoria's recent past, and one demonstrates how archaeologists study ancient cultures, using artifacts from numerous local tribes. Admission is $23 adults, $15 kids 6 to 18. The museum's **National Geographic IMAX Theatre** shows additional-cost movies on various scientific themes and exotic locations. Adjacent to the museum is **Thunderbird Park,** a gorgeous spot full of First Nations totem poles and a ceremonial house.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

Some 13 miles north of downtown Victoria on the Saanich Peninsula, the 130-acre **Butchart Gardens,** 800 Benevenuto Ave., in Brentwood Bay (✆ **866/652-4422** or 250/652-5256; www.butchartgardens.com), started as a beautification project by the wife of a quarry owner, and today has world-renowned English, Italian, and Japanese gardens, along with water gardens and rose gardens. There are also restaurants and a gift shop on-site. Admission (mid-June to Sept) is $23 adults, $12 kids 13 to 17, and $2.50 kids 5 to 12 (check website for admission during other seasons). Most cruise passengers visit as part of a shore excursion. Ditto for the Highland-style **Craigdarroch Castle,** 1050 Joan Crescent (✆ **250/592-5323;** www.craigdarrochcastle.com), which was built in the 1880s as the home of millionaire Scottish coal magnate Robert Dunsmuir. Four stories high and 39 rooms strong, it's topped with stone turrets and furnished in opulent Victorian splendor. Admission is $10 adults, $3.30 kids 6 to 18. Those wishing to visit on their own can make the 40-minute walk up Fort Street from the Inner Harbor, or grab a taxi.

SHOPPING

At the Inner Harbor, the **Government Street promenade** is a 5-block stretch of souvenir shops sprinkled with the occasional treasure, including shops selling thick Cowichan Indian sweaters. On the eastern edge of downtown, a 3-block stretch on Fort Street between Blanshard and Cook streets is known as **Antique Row,** renowned for quality British collectibles. Farther north in Old Town, a complex of former shipping offices and supply stores has been transformed into **Market Square,** 560 Johnson St., at Wharf and Shore streets (✆ **250/386-2441;** www.marketsquare.ca), a self-contained shopping, dining, and entertainment area, with 35-plus shops.

12

The Mexican Riviera & Baja

The so-called Mexican Riviera—the stretch of port cities and resorts extending from Mazatlán in the north to Acapulco in the south—is one of the classic cruise destinations, and not just because it's where *The Love Boat* used to sail every week. Blessed with miles of beaches backed by picturesque mountains, and with a climate that practically guarantees perfect beach weather any day of the year, this is the Caribbean for folks who live on the West Coast.

Spanish conquistadors and missionaries came to this coast in the 16th and 17th centuries to find riches, convert the heathen (frequently at sword point), and establish ports for sailing to the Far East. But it wasn't until the mid–20th century that other travelers discovered the region to be almost tailor-made for relaxation. Hollywood stars arrived first, heading south for anonymity and great sport-fishing. Later the spring-break crowd followed, seeking a place to get lewd and goofy on $1 beers. Today, the region still appeals to them as well as others, offering plenty of family-oriented relaxation and a dash of both history and culture, along with lots of traditional and modern art.

In addition to the Riviera ports, many cruises on those itineraries also stop at **Cabo San Lucas,** at the tip of the Baja Peninsula, a great town that's all about beaches and bars, but also boasts some amazing golf courses and adventure-travel excursions.

HOME PORTS FOR THIS REGION Cruises to this region sail from **San Diego, Los Angeles,** and **San Francisco.**

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY **Spanish** is the tongue of the land, although **English** is spoken in most places that cater to tourists. The Mexican currency is the **nuevo peso** (new peso). Its symbol is the "$" sign, but it's hardly the equivalent of the U.S. dollar—the exchange rate at press time was 14.17 pesos to US$1 (1 peso = US7¢). Most tourist stores gladly accept U.S. dollars. ***Note:*** All prices in this chapter are given in U.S. dollars.

CALLING FROM THE U.S. & CANADA You need to dial the international access code **(011)** and Mexico's country code **(52)** before the numbers listed in this chapter.

1 Acapulco

Why is it we think of the late Ricardo Montalban every time we think of Acapulco? Some kind of mixed 1970s TV metaphor, we suppose, but it still works: The city is a charming star from the old days, when men were men and Latin America meant romance backed by a big string section. The town's temptations are hard to resist, from the nearly year-round sunshine to the men diving off seaside cliffs at sunset. Though most beach resorts are made for relaxing, Acapulco has nonstop 24-hour energy, and its perfectly sculpted bay is an adult playground filled with water-skiers and studs on

WaveRunners. Back in the days when there was a jet set, this was their town, and it's not hard to understand why: The view of Acapulco Bay, framed by mountains and beaches, is just breathtaking.

COMING ASHORE Cruise ships dock west of the Golden Zone hotel strip, a 5-minute walk from Old Acapulco's main plaza, the *zócalo,* right on the Costera (aka Av. Costera Miguel Aleman), the main avenue through the tourist zone, lined with hotels, restaurants, shopping centers, and open-air beach bars. Fort San Diego is just above the docks.

GETTING AROUND **Taxis** are plentiful and inexpensive (only a few dollars) if you're traveling in the downtown area only. Just remember that you should always establish the price with the driver before starting out. The city **buses** are also easy and inexpensive, with covered bus stops all along the Costera, posted with maps that show routes to major sights.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Acapulco City Highlights & Cliff Divers ($49, 4 hr.): A bus tour travels from one end of Acapulco Bay to the other, taking in the beaches, resort hotels, and La Quebrada, where the world-famous **cliff divers** leap into the Pacific.

Acapulco Walking Tour ($29, 4 hr.): A walking tour takes in Fort San Diego with its museum of Mexican history and folk art, the old *zócalo* town square, the cathedral, and other local highlights.

Rafting on the Papagayo River ($129, 5½ hr.): Travel to Pueblo Bravo for a trip down the Papagayo River, floating through narrow canyons and Class II rapids.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Acapulco is all about great beaches and watersports (and nightlife, which early-departing cruise passengers will have to put out of their minds), and as with most of the Mexican Riviera ports, the thing to do here is take in the surf and the seaside cafes. The traditional downtown area, with its shady town square, the ***zócalo*** (also called Plaza Alvarez), is worth a trip, allowing you a glimpse of local life and color. Inexpensive cafes and shops border the plaza, which is shaded by huge mango and rubber trees and cooled by fountains. At its far north end is the **Nuestra Señora de la Soledad** cathedral with its rounded blue tower domes and vaulted roof. From the church, turn east along the side street going off at a right angle (Calle Carranza) to find an arcade with newsstands and more shops. The hill behind the cathedral provides a fantastic view of the town. Just follow the signs for **El Mirador** (lookout point), or take a taxi if it looks like too much of a walk for you.

Near the cruise docks, star-shaped **Fort San Diego** was built in 1616 to defend the bay, and was later rebuilt after a 1776 earthquake leveled the original structure. After years of baking in the Acapulco sun, it was finally refurbished and turned into a museum directed by Mexico's department of archaeological and historic preservation. Today, the fort houses the **Acapulco Historical Museum** (✆ **744/482-3828**), whose displays illuminate Acapulco's past, from precolonial times through the conquistador era, the silver trade between Acapulco and China, the Mexican War of Independence, and beyond. A glass floor in several rooms allows visitors to see the remains of the original fort. Admission costs $3; closed Monday.

Just above downtown, on the other side of the narrow Peninsula de las Playas, **La Quebrada** is probably the most recognized Acapulco icon. It's from here that high

divers leap each day at 1pm from a ledge on the cliff, plunging into the roaring surf of an inlet that's just 20 feet wide and 12 feet deep—but 130 feet down. Many shore excursions include the show as part of a larger city tour, but you can also go on your own, starting behind the cathedral and walking 4 blocks along La Quebrada Street. Admission is $2.50.

BEACHES

In the old days, the downtown beaches—Manzanillo, Honda, Caleta, and Caletilla—were the focal point of Acapulco. The latter two remain popular with both visitors and locals, but today beaches and resort developments also stretch all along the 4-mile length of the bay's shore. Here's a rundown, going from west to east around the bay.

Playa la Angosta is a small, sheltered, often-deserted cove just around the bend from **La Quebrada,** where the cliff divers perform. About 10 minutes south of downtown by taxi, on the Peninsula de las Playas, **Caleta** and **Caletilla** beaches have calm waters and thatched-roof restaurants, with watersports equipment, beach chairs, and umbrellas for rent. From here, brightly painted boats ferry passengers to **Roqueta Island,** a good place to snorkel, sunbathe, hike to a lighthouse, visit a small zoo, or have lunch. The ride across costs about $5 round-trip.

East of the *zócalo,* the major beaches are **Hornos** (near Papagayo Park), **Hornitos, Paraíso, Condesa,** and **Icacos,** followed by the naval base **(La Base)** and **Punta del Guitarrón.** From here, the road climbs to the legendary Las Brisas hotel, then continues to the small, clean bay of **Puerto Marqués,** followed by **Punta Diamante,** about 12 miles from the *zócalo,* fronting the open Pacific and dominated by several resort hotels.

SHOPPING

Acapulco is not one of the best places to buy Mexican crafts, but it does have a few interesting shops. The best are at the **Mercado Parazal** (often called the Mercado de Artesanías), on Calle Velázquez de León near Cinco de Mayo in the downtown *zócalo* area. When you see Sanborn's department store/drugstore, turn right and walk behind it for several blocks, asking directions if necessary. Here you'll find stalls of curios from around the country, including silver, embroidered cotton clothing, rugs, pottery, and papier-mâché, as well as on-site artists painting ceramics with village scenes. The shopkeepers aren't pushy, but they'll test your bargaining mettle. Before buying silver, examine it carefully and look for ".925" stamped on the back. This supposedly signifies that the silver is 92.5% pure, though the less expensive silver called *alpaca* may also bear this stamp.

For resort wear, head to the boutiques crowding the **Costera,** where you'll find prices generally lower than what you'd pay in the United States.

2 Cabo San Lucas

Cabo San Lucas, the rowdier half of the conjoined towns commonly referred to as Los Cabos, is one big bar-and-beach scene perched at the very tip of the Baja Peninsula, with the Pacific Ocean on one side and the mouth of the Sea of Cortez on the other. (Its quieter twin, San Jose del Cabo, is about 21 miles away, down a corridor lined with resorts.) Cabo made hardly a blip on the world's radar until after World War II, when Hollywood celebs and yachters started traveling here for sport-fishing. In 1973, the completion of the Transpeninsular Highway finally linked the town to the rest of North America. By the early 1980s, the Mexican government had realized the area's growth potential and began investing in new highways, a larger airport, golf courses, and modern marine facilities. Today, the town is a playground seemingly built entirely for vacationers' gratification, full of beaches, beach bars, bar bars, crafts shops, restaurants, and did we mention bars? There's almost nothing of cultural or historic significance here (unless you're big on pop sociology), so your choices are to throw yourself into the hedonism or sign up for a nature- or adventure-oriented excursion.

COMING ASHORE Cabo San Lucas lacks pier facilities for anything but small ships (in the 100-passenger range), so large cruise ships must anchor offshore and ferry passengers in by tender. You step ashore in the **Cabo San Lucas Marina** (in the Cabo San Lucas Bay harbor), which is chockablock with tour operators, information stands, shops, and transportation options.

GETTING AROUND The tender dock at the marina is a pleasant 10- to 15-minute walk from the town center, around the rim of the Y-shaped harbor. Essentially, everything in town is within a few blocks of the harbor rim. If you keep walking all the way around (at least a 30-min. walk, just because of the harbor's twists and turns), you'll reach the start of the beaches, but the fastest way to access them is by **water taxi,** which costs about $10 per person. You can also catch a regular **car taxi** (about $5 per carload) or a **bicycle taxi** (for which you'll have to negotiate a rate). All are in vast supply right at the dock. Taxis can also take you to the golf courses on the corridor between Cabo San Lucas and San Jose del Cabo; expect to pay between $25 and $35 each way.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

In addition to the excursions listed here, the cruise lines typically offer nearly two dozen other snorkeling, scuba, sailing, and bus tours.

Snorkel Tour by Zodiac ($69, 3 hr.): A two-stop snorkeling trip via inflatable Zodiac boats leaves from the tender pier. The boats pass Lover's Beach (see "Beaches," below) en route to Pelican Rock Cove for your first dive, then on to palm-lined Santa Maria Cove, which is part of a protected marine sanctuary.

Cabo San Lucas Sport-Fishing ($179, 5 hr.): Superb sport-fishing put Cabo San Lucas on the map. After boarding your sport-fishing vessel, you'll take a brief cruise to the fishing grounds, then spend a few hours trolling for marlin and sailfish. The good news: Beer is included. The bad news: Because the cruise ships can't store your catch, fishing for trophy fish is catch and release. Nontrophy fish are kept by the crew. A $10 fishing license is required.

Cabo Zodiac Whale-Watch ($89, 2½ hr.): Every year from January to March, Cabo San Lucas is visited by humpback, gray, and blue whales, and the best, most intimate, and action-packed way to see them is aboard one of these inflatable craft, which seat only 15 people.

Horseback Ride on the Beach ($79, 3 hr.): Mount up for an hour-long ride along Cabo's cactus-lined beaches, followed by a cool drink at a beach hotel and another hour free to swim and work on your tan.

Cabo Cocktail Lesson ($69, 4 hr.): Now this is a Cabo excursion: Participants attend a mixology seminar at a five-star resort, learning how Cabo's bartenders mix the resort's most popular frozen cocktails. The excursion includes 2 free hours at the resort.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Cabo is small and manageable, spreading out north and west of the harbor and edged by foothills, dramatically jagged rocks, and desert mountains. A wide **walkway** wraps most of the way around the harbor, lined with bars, restaurants, and shops. On the other side of those bars and restaurants, about 650 feet from the water's edge, **Boulevard Marina** is the main artery that curves around the harbor and essentially *is* the town, at least from a short-term visitor's standpoint. Bars and Mexican restaurants serving fresh seafood crowd one another for space, so pick the one that seems to say "you." The most famous of the bunch is the **Cabo Wabo Cantina** (✆ **624/143-1188;** www.cabowabo.com), partly owned by former Van Halen frontman Sammy Hagar. It's right in the center of town, with a big sign on Marina and the main entrance around back on Vicente Guerrero, at Cárdenas. Expect a rock-theme-bar atmosphere,

with Van Halen videos and music playing on TV monitors. Unfortunately for cruise passengers, the place doesn't get happening till the evening, after your ship has sailed, but you'll still be able to sip in the atmosphere. Nearby, **El Squid Roe,** on Marina opposite Plaza Bonita (✆ **624/143-0655;** www.elsquidroe.com), is another "Spring Break for Life" kind of bar of the Señor Frog and Carlos 'n Charlie's variety. For an antidote to big bars, drop into **Slim's Elbow Room,** "the World's Smallest Bar," on Marina just in front of the building that houses Cabo Wabo. It's just a little bit bigger than a pool table. That's our kind of place.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

Cruise ship passengers in town for just a few hours should stick to downtown Cabo and the beaches unless they're on a shore excursion and/or want to play **golf,** a sport with which Los Cabos is increasingly associated. Most of the courses are along the corridor between the two towns.

- The 18-hole, 7,100-yard, Nicklaus-designed Ocean Course at the corridor's **Cabo del Sol Resort** (✆ **800/386-2465;** www.cabodelsol.com) is known for its challenging 3 finishing holes. Tom Weiskopf designed the newer 18-hole Desert Course. Greens fees for both are $85 to $350 (including cart), depending on time and season.
- The 18-hole, 6,945-yard course at **Cabo Real,** by the Me Meliá in the hotel zone (✆ **877/795-8727** or 624/144-1200; www.caboreal.com), was designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr., and features holes that sit high on mesas overlooking the Sea of Cortez. Greens fees are $180 to $280, including cart.
- The 18-hole course at **Cabo San Lucas Country Club/Raven Golf Club,** designed by Roy Dye (✆ **888/328-8501;** www.golfincabo.com), overlooks the juncture of the Pacific Ocean and Sea of Cortez, including the famous Land's End rocks. It includes the longest hole in Mexico, a 607-yard par-5. Greens fees are $87 to $204.

BEACHES

When your ship anchors offshore, you'll see the long, curving sweep of **Medano Beach** stretching into the distance to the right of town (on the east side of the bay). It looks to be about a 5-minute walk from the docks, but looks can be deceiving: The Marina's two main arms stand between the tender dock and the sand, so you either have to walk all the way around (about a 30-min. trek) or hop a water taxi or regular taxi (see "Getting Around," above). At practically any point along the stretch, you'll be able to rent WaveRunners, kayaks, windsurfing boards, and snorkeling gear. Restaurant/bars line the sand at intervals, with some quiet stretches in between.

As your ship comes into the bay, you may see a small beach off your port bow, nestled amid the rugged rocks that separate the bay from the Pacific. This is **Lovers Beach,** the most beautiful beach spot in town. It's accessible only by water taxi from the docks and there are no facilities to speak of (just the occasional local selling drinks), but it's totally dreamy, with a real *From Here to Eternity* kind of vibe. At low tide, you can cross through the famous natural arch that connects the two seas here. Swimming is generally safe only on the Sea of Cortez side, facing the bay.

Farther north, along the Pacific Coast, **Playa Solmar** (at the Solmar and Playa Grande resorts) is a magnificent stretch of sand, but don't bother going unless you just want a great view: There's a bad riptide, and swimming is prohibited.

Small-Ship Cruises in Baja's Sea of Cortez

The Baja Peninsula, stretching some 800 miles from the U.S. border to Cabo San Lucas, is almost like a sun-baked version of Southeast Alaska, a long, thin strip of mainland and islands, sparsely inhabited in places and often breathtakingly gorgeous. So, it's no wonder some of the same small-ship lines that sail Alaska in the summer move their ships here in winter to offer cruises on the Sea of Cortez side of the peninsula, concentrating on nature, whale-watching, and visits to the region's historic ports. Usually sailing from **La Paz** (the capital city of Baja California Sur) or **Cabo San Lucas,** these small vessels spend time sailing among the sparsely inhabited **coastal islands,** where guests can hike the arid landscape and go tide-pooling along the rocky coast.

There are also visits to historic towns such as **Loreto,** site of the first permanent Spanish settlement on the peninsula, with its manicured fig trees, cobblestone streets, and lovely colonial architecture. Arts-and-crafts shops line the streets, and a museum at the historic mission—the first in the Californias, founded in 1697—offers a glimpse into Baja's past.

Most small-ship cruises also include an excursion by bus to **Bahía Magdalena** on the Pacific coast, where guides take you out in small *panga* boats to one of the world's best whale-watching grounds. Gray whales winter here, birthing their calves and getting ready for their trip back to the Arctic and Bering seas. When we went, a 40-foot mother gray whale and her calf swam right toward our small boat, ducking under on one side and coming up on the other. That's some close interaction, but not as close as some others get: Occasionally, a gray will pop up right next to the boats to see what's going on, and allow people to pat it on the head. Talk about up close and personal. **American Safari Cruises, Cruise West,** and **Lindblad Expeditions** all have winter Baja sailings (see chapter 8 for more about these lines).

SHOPPING

You'll find no shortage of shopping opportunities in Cabo, but few surprises either. The newly opened **Puerto Paraíso** (www.puertoparaiso.com), located on the far west end of the marina, has luxury outlets like Cartier, Hermés, Montblanc, and Fendi, as well as souvenir and clothing stores. Just beyond the tender dock at the harbor, a large, covered **handicrafts market** has scores of vendors selling pretty much the same merchandise you'll find in town: a mixture of T-shirts, crafts, blankets, trinkets, and tequila. In town, Cabo Wabo (see above) sells its own brand, **Tequila Cabo Wabo,** at its gift shop, while other shops stock every other brand in existence. Shops and crafts marts alternate with jewelry stores and high-end (if not too inspiring) art galleries along Boulevard Marina.

3 Ixtapa/Zihuatanejo

Located side by side about 158 miles northwest of Acapulco, Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo are the odd couple of twin beach resorts. Ixtapa (Eex-*tah*-pah) is a model of modern

infrastructure, services, and luxury resorts, while Zihuatanejo (See-wah-tah-*neh*-hoh, or just "Zihua"), only 4 miles to the south, is the quintessential rustic Mexican beach village—and, oddly, the place where cruise ships pull in. The area, with a backdrop of the Sierra Madre mountains and a foreground of Pacific Ocean waters, provides opportunities for beaching, scuba diving, deep-sea fishing, and golf.

Zihuatanejo spreads out around a beautiful bay, with the downtown area to the north and a beautiful long beach and the Sierra foothills to the east. The heart of town is the Paseo del Pescador, a brick waterfront walkway bordering the Municipal Beach with many shops and calm, casual restaurants. A good highway connects Zihua to **Ixtapa,** where tall hotels line the wide Playa Palmar beach, with lush palm groves and mountains as their backdrop. The main street, Boulevard Ixtapa, is full of small shopping plazas and restaurants, with the Marina Ixtapa at the north end of the beach from the hotel zone boasting excellent restaurants, private yacht slips, and an 18-hole golf course. Unless you want to play golf or explore Ixtapa's more resortish style, we recommend settling back for a quiet day in Zihua.

COMING ASHORE Ships anchor in sheltered **Zihuatanejo Bay** and tender passengers to the town's municipal pier. The brick-paved Paseo del Pescador adjoins, with shops and restaurants within easy walking distance.

GETTING AROUND You can walk around Zihuatanejo. **Taxi** fares between Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo run about $5.50, while fares within either town hover in the $3-to-$5 range.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Zihuatanejo Sail & Snorkel ($79, 3 hr.): Climb aboard a trimaran and sail to Manzanillo Beach, one of the best snorkeling spots on the bay, where you'll drop anchor for direct access to the water.

Countryside Tour ($54, 3½ hr.): Leave Zihuatanejo by bus and head into the countryside, where you'll tour a fruit plantation that raises papaya, mango, grapefruit, and coconut; then visit an open-air factory to see bricks and floor tiles made using traditional methods. At Barra de Potosi lagoon, you can stroll the beach and watch local fishermen cast their nets.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

In Zihuatanejo, here's what you do: Step off the tender, take a deep breath, let it out, and order a beer or margarita. That's about it. **Paseo del Pescador** is full of nice little bars, shops, and seafood restaurants, and occasionally a musician will stroll by. For a little history, the **Museo de Arqueología de la Costa Grande,** near Guerrero at the east end of Paseo del Pescador (✆ **755/554-7552**), traces the history of the Acapulco-to-Ixtapa/Zihuatanejo "Costa Grande" region from pre-Hispanic times (when it was known as Cihuatlán) through the colonial era. Most of the museum's pottery and stone artifacts give evidence of extensive trade with far-off cultures and regions, including the Toltec and Teotihuacán near Mexico City, the Olmec on the Pacific and Gulf coasts, and areas known today as the states of Nayarit, Michoacán, and San Luis Potosí. Local indigenous groups gave the Aztec tribute items, including cotton *tilmas* (capes) and *cacao* (chocolate), representations of which can be seen here. Signs are in Spanish, but an accompanying brochure is available in English. Admission is $1; closed Monday.

Beyond the port area, there's only Ixtapa, and for cruise visitors, Ixtapa is mostly about . . .

BEACHES

IXTAPA Ixtapa's main beach, **Playa Palmar,** is a lovely white-sand arc on the edge of the hotel zone, with dramatic rock formations silhouetted in the sea. The surf can be rough, so use caution and don't swim when a red flag is posted. Lovely **Playa Vista Hermosa,** just south of Ixtapa, fronting the Hotel Las Brisas Ixtapa, is framed by striking rock formations and is very attractive for sunbathing, but has heavy surf and strong undertow (use caution if you swim here). **Playa Linda,** about 8 miles north of Ixtapa, is the primary out-of-town beach, with watersports equipment rentals available.

ZIHUATANEJO At Zihuatanejo's town beach, **Playa Municipal,** the local fishermen pull their colorful boats up onto the sand, making for a fine photo op. The small shops and restaurants lining the waterfront are great for people-watching and absorbing the flavor of daily village life. A cement-and-sand walkway runs from the *malecón* east along the water to **Playa Madera (Wood Beach),** which is good for bodysurfing. To the south is Zihuatanejo's largest and most beautiful beach, **Playa La Ropa,** a mile-long sweep of sand with calm waters and a great view of the sunset. Palm groves edge the shoreline, and some lovely small hotels and restaurants nestle in the hills. A taxi from town costs about $4. The beach's name stems from the sinking of a galleon that was carrying silk clothing *(ropa)* back from the Philippines. When the ship went down, its cargo washed ashore here. **Playa Las Gatas (Cats Beach),** across the bay from Playa La Ropa and Zihuatanejo, has exceptionally clear waters and a man-made reef that makes for calm swimming (good for kids) and good snorkeling. A little dive shop on the beach rents gear; there are also a number of open-air seafood restaurants. Water taxis from the Zihuatanejo town pier can get you here for about $4 round-trip.

SHOPPING

IXTAPA Shopping in Ixtapa is not especially memorable: mostly T-shirts and Mexican crafts, plus brand-name sportswear. All of the shops are in the same area on Boulevard Ixtapa, across from the beachside hotels.

ZIHUATANEJO Zihuatanejo has its share of T-shirt and souvenir shops, but it's also a decent place to buy crafts, folk art, and jewelry. The **artisans' market** on Calle Cinco de Mayo is a good place to start browsing before moving on to specialty shops that spread inland from the waterfront. For a taste of local commerce, visit the **municipal market,** which sprawls over several blocks off Avenida Benito Juárez (about 5 blocks inland from the waterfront). Here, produce, fish, and nut vendors mix with stands selling huarache sandals, hammocks, and baskets.

4 Mazatlán

Almost straight across the Sea of Cortez from Cabo San Lucas, Mazatlán—"The Land of the Deer" in the old Nahuatl language—dates from the beginning of the 19th century, when German immigrants developed it as a shipping port. After a lull of about 160 years, it gained new fame as a sport-fishing capital, then as a destination for American college kids on spring break. Today, families and mature vacationers are flocking here as well, taking advantage of the low prices and 10-plus miles of beaches. For cruise travelers, the points of interest form a huge barbell shape, with the historic

downtown area at the south end (near where your ship docks), the tourist-oriented **Zona Dorada (Golden Zone)** about 4 miles to the north, and the long, uninteresting curve of Avenida del Mar in between.

COMING ASHORE Ships dock on the south side of town along a navigational channel, in the midst of substantial commercial shipping. Debarking passengers must take a short tram from the ship to the welcome terminal, where they run a veritable gauntlet of gift and craft shops before popping out into air again on the far side.

GETTING AROUND The port is about a 15- or 20-minute walk from the center of the old downtown, but you can also take a **taxi.** In fact, we challenge you *not* to—there are so many of them on hand at the pier that you might find yourself sitting in one without ever having intended to. In addition to the green-and-white, fixed-rate **taxis,** you'll also see hundreds of open-sided ***pulmonía*** cars, which look like a cross between a jeep and a golf cart. Apparently the name (which literally means "pneumonia") stems from an old belief that riding in an open-air car can make you sick. Fares between the port (or Old Mazatlán) and the Zona Dorada average $5 to $8 for either kind of taxi.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

In addition to the tours listed here, cruise lines offer a lot of "mix-and-match" Mazatlán bus tours, taking in highlights of downtown and almost always heading through the Golden Zone for shopping.

Old Mazatlán Walking Tour ($34, 4 hr.): Start at the shore-side Cerro de Neveria, where divers plunge off a cliff into the sea. Then amble through Old Mazatlán's narrow, shady streets, visiting the Teatro Angela Peralta (see "On Your Own: Within Walking Distance," below), stopping at a cafe for refreshments, and then heading to the main plaza and the cathedral. It's not a bad way to get oriented, and you can continue walking on your own around the old market, and then (if you like) grab a taxi out to the Golden Zone.

Sierra Madre Tour ($79, 7½ hr.): Travel by bus into the foothills of the Sierra Madre to the town of Concordia, founded in 1550 and famed for its furniture, handmade pottery, and baroque church. Continue to Copala, a former gold-mining town founded in 1565, where you can wander the narrow, cobbled streets and see the old colonial houses and 16th-century stone church. The tour includes a traditional Mexican lunch and a shopping stop in the Zona Dorada.

Pacifico Brewery Tour ($59, 2½ hr.): Founded in 1900, Pacifico brews one of Mexico's most popular beers. Tour the brewery, have a taste or three, and take in the incredible view of Mazatlán from the rooftop bar/hospitality room.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Though most people will probably take a taxi the short distance to downtown, we're going to consider it "walking distance" both for argument's sake (we walked it easily) and to distinguish it from the more distant Golden Zone.

Downtown Mazatlán is centered around the palm-shaded **Plaza Principal,** also called Plaza Revolución and filled with vendors, pigeons, shoeshine men under Pacifico beer umbrellas, and old gentlemen sitting in the shade. A Victorian-style wrought-iron bandstand sits at its center and the **Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception** hovers over one end. Built in the 1800s, the cathedral has twin, yellow-tiled steeples, while its interior has a vaulted ceiling and more than a dozen chandeliers. It's

worth a quick peek. One block behind the cathedral is the covered **Mercado Municipal** (aka Mercado Pino Suarez, or just "the municipal market"). Taking up the whole city block between Juarez and Serdan, it has its share of tourist shops, but is more a place for locals, with stands selling fresh produce, meat, clothing, herbal remedies, and religious mementos. It's a vibrant slice of life, as are all the streets around it.

Backtrack along Juarez a few blocks to reach Mazatlán's **historic district,** a 20-square-block area centered around the pretty little **Plazuela Machado,** which boasts a few sidewalk restaurants and sometimes hosts local cultural events. It's bordered by Frías, Constitución, Carnaval, and Sixto Osuna. On one corner of the square stands the Italian-style **Teatro Angela Peralta** (✆ **669/982-4447;** www.culturamazatlan.com/tap1.php), built between 1869 and 1881. A center of Mazatlán arts and culture for its first 40 years, the theater fell into disrepair following the Mexican revolution of 1910 and began a period of decay that lasted until the late 1980s, when a group of concerned citizens spearheaded its renewal. Today, the 841-seat theater is a national historic monument and regularly hosts folkloric ballets, contemporary dance, symphony concerts, opera, and jazz performances. Its sumptuous, jewel-box-like interior, with three levels of dark, woody balconies, has been restored to its 19th-century glory. It costs $1 to tour the building.

The blocks around the theater and Plazuela abound with beautiful old buildings and colorful town houses trimmed with wrought iron and carved stone. Many buildings were restored as part of a downtown beautification program, which aimed to turn the neighborhood into the center of Mazatlán's artistic community. Half a block to the right of the theater's entrance is the **Nidart Galería** (see "Shopping," below). Check out the **town houses** on Libertad between Domínguez and Carnaval and the two lavish **mansions** on Ocampo at Domínguez and at Carnaval. For a rest stop, try the **Café Pacífico** (decorated with historic pictures of Mazatlán) or one of the other cafes on the Plazuela. Those with an interest in Mexican history can walk a couple of blocks down Sixto Osuna to Venustiano Carranza, where you'll find the small **Museo Arqueológico de Mazatlán,** Sixto Osuna 76 (✆ **669/981-1455**), which displays both pre-Hispanic artifacts and contemporary art. Admission is free; closed Monday.

If you feel like taking a good, tiring walk, head west down Constitución toward the ocean; then turn left and walk along the oceanside walkway on Paseo Clausen. Passing the beach at Olas Altas (the original Mazatlán beach strip), you'll see signs for **Cerro del Vigía** (Lookout Hill). Follow these up the steep hill at the edge of town, bending around the school and then hugging the coast. Below, accessible via several sets of stairs, is **Playa del Centenario,** a lovely stretch of pounding surf with views of the offshore Sea Lion rocks, the El Faro lighthouse (the second-highest in the world, after Gibraltar), and Deer and Wolf islands, just off the Zona Dorada. Frigate birds and pelicans soar overhead, and down below are sea-carved arches and patches of bright-green vegetation. You'd be pounded to death on the rocks if you tried to swim here, but it's a romantic picnic spot. At the point of the lookout, a stair-path leads out to a viewing platform that resembles the prow of a ship and lets onto some wonderful vistas. From here, continue along the coast road right around and back to the cruise docks.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

Four miles from downtown, the **Zona Dorada (Golden Zone)** begins where Avenida del Mar intersects Avenida Rafael Buelna and becomes Avenida Camarón Sábalo,

Mazatlán Golf

Mazatlán probably affords the best golf value in Mexico, with two notable courses open to the public.

- The 27-hole course at the **El Cid** resorts, just east of the Zona Dorada (✆ **669/913-3333;** www.elcid.com), has 9 holes designed by Lee Trevino as well as 18 designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr. It's open to the public, though preference is given to hotel guests, and tee times book up quickly. Greens fees are $75 for 18 holes, plus $17 for the caddy.
- The **Estrella del Mar Golf Club,** across the channel from downtown, on Isla de la Piedra (✆ **669/982-3300;** www.estrelladelmar.com), is an 18-hole, 7,004-yard course, also designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr. Greens fees, including cart, run $75 to $110 depending on the season.

which leads north through the tourist zone. While shops, restaurants, and bars are much more abundant here than downtown, it's very, very, very touristy, and worth the drive only if you're in a beach-party mood.

BEACHES

Much as we're not nuts about the Golden Zone, it is the better spot for beaches. At the beginning of the zone, you'll find **Playa Gaviotas** and several other beaches backed by resort hotels. Remember that all beaches in Mexico are public property, so all of these are accessible to visitors. Farther north, **Playa Sábalo** is perhaps the best beach in Mazatlán. The next point jutting into the water is Punta Sábalo, beyond which you'll find a bridge over a channel that flows in and out of a lagoon. Beyond the marina, more beaches stretch all the way to Los Cerritos.

In the downtown area, **Playa Olas Altas** (at the western edge of town) is a thin strip of curving beach backed by several low-key sidewalk bars. It's the closest beach to the docks, but lacks any amenities or any kind of "scene." Around a rocky promontory north of Olas Altas is **Playa Norte,** which offers several miles of good sand beach with numerous *palapa* bars, but busy Avenida del Mar is right there behind you, taking something away from the experience.

SHOPPING

La Zona Dorada is the biggest area for shopping, with hundreds of shops and stalls selling the usual items for this part of Mexico: jewelry, shell-covered art, T-shirts, and lots of other touristy souvenirs, with a smattering of folk art mixed in, most of dubious quality. **Downtown** is more oriented toward locals, but is much more authentic. Check the historic district around the Teatro Angela Peralta for small galleries and shops, among them the wonderful **Nidart Galería,** av. Libertad 45 at Carnaval (✆ **669/981-0002;** www.nidart.com), an exhibition space selling works created by local artists on-site, as well as works from around Mexico. This is quality stuff, including clay and leather sculptures and masks, paintings, woodwork, jewelry, and other items, priced much lower than you'd expect.

5 Puerto Vallarta

Looking at the vibrant, bustling Puerto Vallarta of today, it's hard to imagine that only 50 years ago, the only tourists who stopped here landed on a dirt airstrip outside town. Established in the 1850s as a port for processing silver from the Sierra Madre mountains, the place took off as a resort destination only when Hollywood stars began arriving 110 years later. In 1963, John Huston brought Ava Gardner and Richard Burton here to film the Tennessee Williams play *Night of the Iguana,* and Burton's new love, Elizabeth Taylor, came along even though both were married to other people at the time. Paparazzi arrived hot on their heels, and the rest is history.

Downtown, a seaside promenade (or *malecón*) runs north–south beside Paseo Díaz Ordaz, adorned with public art and stretching the length of El Central—the center of town. From the waterfront, cobblestone streets reach a mere half-dozen blocks back into the hills. The areas bordering the **Río Cuale** are the oldest parts of town, and a lovely island in midstream, **Isla Cuale,** is full of shops and lush foliage. Three bridges link the two sections of downtown, the most pleasant being a footbridge that hugs the shoreline. Isla Cuale can be accessed from any of them. The area north of the river is the main tourist zone, while the area immediately to the south is home to a growing number of sidewalk cafes and fine restaurants, plus the town's better beaches.

Many excursions here will take you outside town and up into the foothills of the **Sierra Madre.** Farther up, the Huichol Indians still live in relative isolation, simultaneously protecting their culture from outside influences and making a living off their distinctive beaded artwork, which you'll see around town.

COMING ASHORE Cruise ships dock at the **Puerto Vallarta Marina,** about 3 miles north of downtown along the busy Avenida Francisco Medina Ascencio. A plethora of crafts and T-shirt shops, along with several small bars and restaurants, are clustered right in the port area; but it's not a destination in itself, so plan to take a taxi into town if you're not doing an excursion. Marina Vallarta, a resort and yacht harbor, is just north of the terminal.

GETTING AROUND Technically, you can walk into town. We did it, just to see if it's worth doing, and here's the scoop: It's not. Instead, take a shore excursion to get back into the hills, or grab one of the **taxis** that greet ships at the dock, charging about $6. Once you're in the center of town, nearly everything is within walking distance both north and south of the river. And don't worry about getting back to the ship from here; the cabbies will find you.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Jungle Canopy Adventure ($139, 5 hr.): Ever wanted to be George of the Jungle? At a private reserve in the Sierra Madre, professional guides help you master the techniques of using horizontal traverse cables to travel through the jungle canopy, high up in the trees. Observation platforms give you a breather and a chance to observe the flora and fauna. At the end of your adventure, you rappel down a tree to the forest floor.

Sierra Madre Hiking Expedition ($39, 4 hr.): Head by bus to Rancho Sierra Madre, where a local naturalist leads your 5-mile hike through the forest to a volcanic hot spring, where you can take a dip. Back at the ranch, you're free to wander around to check out the operation or just relax with a drink.

Hideaway at Las Caletas ($89, 7½ hr.): Las Caletas was Oscar-winning director John Huston's hideaway, so basically on this tour you get to live like a celeb, traveling to the cove by motor launch, relaxing on its palm-lined beaches and drinking in its bar, taking a nature hike, or going kayaking or snorkeling. Some of Huston's possessions are still on display.

Swimming with Dolphins ($179, 2–3 hr.): At the Dolphin Adventure Center, you get a half-hour in a saltwater pool with two Pacific bottlenose dolphins. Do we really have to say more? A longer excursion, **Dolphin Trainer for a Day** ($299, 7 hr.), lets you work with dolphin trainers in the water and out.

Swimming with Sea Lions ($99, 2½ hr.): At the Dolphin Adventure Center, you'll get an orientation about sea lion physiology and behavior before entering the water to swim with the big goofballs. **The Snorkel with a Sea Lion at Las Caletas** tour ($159, 7 hr.) takes you an hour north of Puerto Vallarta by boat to Las Caletas, once the hideaway of film director John Huston, where you can interact with sea lions in open water, close to the beach.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

Assuming you don't want to make the hot, dusty 3-mile walk into town, let's call everything here beyond walking distance. Once you do make it to town, though, Puerto Vallarta's cobblestone streets are a pleasure to explore on foot: filled with small shops, rows of windows edged with wrought-iron curls, and vistas of red-tile roofs and the sea. Start with a walk up and down the ***malecón,*** taking in the fine collection of public art that stretches from end to end. Across from Carlos O'Brien's restaurant on the north end is Ramiz Barquett's *Nostalgia,* depicting a couple sharing a romantic moment while gazing out to the bay. Farther south is an array of fanciful, almost Dr. Seuss–like chairs by renowned Mexican artist Alejandro Colunga, one topped with a large octopus head, another with giant ears for backrests. Farther south is Sergio Bustamante's *Ladder to Heaven,* depicting children climbing a ladder to nowhere. Closer to the main square, you'll find *Boy on the Seahorse,* which has become a Puerto Vallarta icon.

Near here, the main square is dominated by the **Parish of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe church,** topped with a curious crown held in place by angels. It's a replica of the one worn by Empress Carlota during her brief time in Mexico as Emperor Maximilian's wife. On its steps, women sell religious mementos; across the narrow street, stalls sell herbs for curing common ailments. Stretching along the north end of the square is the municipal building, which has a large, folkloric **Manuel Lepe mural** inside in its stairwell.

Three blocks south of the church, head east on Libertad, lined with small shops and pretty upper windows, to the **Río Cuale municipal market** by the river (see "Shopping," below); then cross the bridge to **Isla Cuale.** Near the sea end of the island, the small **Museo Río Cuale** has a permanent exhibit of pre-Columbian ceramics, jewelry, and statuary (free admission).

Retrace your steps to the market and Libertad, and follow Calle Miramar to the set of rough stone steps. Follow these past the cafe, then take the steep, narrow, pastel steps up to Calle Zaragoza, pausing on the stairs to catch your breath and also for a nice view of the sea. Once on Zaragoza, go right 1 block to the famous **arched pink bridge** that connected Richard Burton's and Elizabeth Taylor's houses.

BEACHES

For years, beaches were Puerto Vallarta's main attraction. Unfortunately, those near the cruise terminal are the worst in the area, with darker sand and seasonal inflows of stones. Stretching south to town, the **hotel zone** is known for broad, smooth beaches, open to the public and accessible primarily through hotel lobbies. Just south of town, the easiest beach to reach is **Playa Los Muertos** (aka Playa Olas Altas or Playa del Sol), just off Calle Olas Altas, south of the Río Cuale. The water can be rough, but the wide beach is home to several *palapa* restaurants that offer food, beverage, and beach-chair service. About 6 miles south of town along Hwy. 200, **Playa Mismaloya,** where *Night of the Iguana* was filmed, boasts clear waters. Entrance to the public beach is just to the left of the Jolla de Mismaloya Resort. There's an *Iguana*-themed restaurant and bar on-site.

SHOPPING

Puerto Vallarta is one big shopping opportunity, with hundreds of small stores selling everything from fine folk art and modern art to tacky T-shirts, plus tremendous amounts of silver jewelry and sculpture depicting everything from Aztec calendars to Mickey Mouse. The **municipal market** is just north of the Río Cuale, where Calle Libertad and Calle Rodríguez meet. The *mercado* sells clothes, jewelry, serapes, shawls, leather accessories and suitcases, papier-mâché parrots, stuffed frogs and armadillos, and, of course, T-shirts. Be sure to comparison-shop, and definitely bargain before buying. Upstairs, a sort of low-key food court serves inexpensive Mexican meals, giving adventurous diners a cheap, authentic local experience. Exit the market by the corner of Encino and Maramoros and walk across the suspended plank-and-rope bridge to **Río Cuale Island,** where outdoor stalls sell crafts, gifts, folk art, and clothing.

Back in El Centro, head for the corner of Calle Galeana and Calle Morelos (right across from the *Boy on the Seahorse* statue) to find the **Huichol Collection Museum Gallery** (✆ **322/223-2141**), the best place in town for authentic Huichol Indian art. Descendants of the Aztec, the Huichol live in the high sierra north and east of Vallarta. They produce remarkable beadwork and "yarn painting" inspired by visions they experience during hallucinogenic peyote ceremonies. The colors explode from wall hangings, masks, bowls, and animal forms, the latter three made from carved wooden shapes to which incredibly intricate beadwork is added, eventually covering the entire surface. A Huichol artist is often at work in the back of the shop, and explanations in English tell you what you're looking at. Prices can be high for large pieces, but are worth it for the quality.

Some of the more attractive shops are a block or two inland from the *malecón,* centered roughly around the intersection of Calle Corona and Calle Morelos. One block north, near the corner of Calle Aldama, **La Casa del Tequila** (✆ **322/222-2000**) has a tasting room where you can sample a selection of fine tequilas, plus a hacienda-style taco bar with swirling ceiling fans and cane seating.

13

Bermuda

This neat and tidy oasis in the middle of the Atlantic is edged with pink-sand beaches and rocky cliffs—and crawling with Brits in shorts. And not just any shorts, but shorts colored in perky tones of pink, green, or yellow, and paired with sports jackets, ties, and knee-highs. To the casual visitor, Bermuda is a pleasant paradox of sorts, mixing sane and proper with a healthy dose of silly (back to those shorts again). But what really matters to the cruise passenger is that Bermuda is an orderly, beautiful, easy place to visit. Aside from the Caribbean and The Bahamas, the 21-square-mile island nation of Bermuda (which is actually a chain of more than 100 small islands), sitting out in the Atlantic roughly parallel to South Carolina (or Casablanca, if you're measuring from the east), is the other major island cruise destination from the U.S. Eastern seaboard.

Although the Spanish stumbled upon Bermuda in the early 16th century, it was the British who first settled here in 1609, when the ship *Sea Venture,* en route to Virginia's Jamestown colony, was wrecked on the island's reefs. No lives were lost, and the crew and passengers built two new ships and continued on to Virginia; but three crewmembers stayed behind and became the island's first permanent settlers. Bermuda became a crown colony in 1620 and remains one today, retaining a very British character—the island is divided up into parishes, driving is on the left, and horse-drawn carriages trot about—but the sun and the ubiquitous Bermuda shorts serve as proof you're in the islands.

That's not to say things aren't bustling when the ships are in town at King's Wharf, in the West End, where most ships are now docking because they're too large for the piers in Hamilton and St. George's, Bermuda's other two port towns, but a calm and controlled atmosphere reigns as visitors fan out across the island. There are many powdery-soft beaches easily accessible by taxi or motor scooter, and Bermuda has more golf courses per square mile than any other place in the world. For shoppers, Front and Queen streets in Hamilton have dozens of shops and department stores, most specializing in English items, while the interest of history buffs is piqued by the 300-year-old St. Peter's Church, museums, and other sites within walking distance of the pier in St. George's. From King's Wharf, there are also impressive exhibits at the Maritime Museum, which is built into the ruins of Bermuda's oldest fort at the Royal Naval Dockyard.

Cruise ships have been sailing to Bermuda for over a century, making it one of the earliest cruise destinations. The Quebec Steamship Company, which eventually evolved into the Furness Bermuda Line, began service from New York to Bermuda in 1874 with the small steamers *Canima* and *Bermuda* and then added the *Orinoco* in 1881, the *Trinidad* in 1893, and the liner *Pretoria,* acquired from the Union Line, in 1897.

ATLANTIC OCEAN
Fort St. Catherine
Tobacco Bay
St. George's Golf Club
St. George's Island
St. George's
St. George's Harbour
Paget Island
Smith's Island
Gunner Bay
ST. GEORGE'S
Causeway
St. David's Island
Ireland Island N.
Bermuda Maritime Museum
Royal Navy Dockyard/ King's Wharf
Ireland Island S.
Mangrove Bay
Somerset Village
SANDYS
Watford Bridge
Ely's Harbour
Great Sound
Spanish Point
Two Rock Passage
Bay Rd.
North Shore Rd.
PEMBROKE
Hamilton
Front St.
DEVONSHIRE
Long Island
Hawkins Island
Ferry
Ports Island
Hinson Island
Hamilton Harbour
Middle Rd.
Port Royal Golf Course
Darrell Island
Harbour Rd.
PAGET
Belmont Hotel Golf & Country Club
Little Sound
Riddell's Bay Golf
Middle Rd.
WARWICK
South Shore Rd.
Elbow Beach
SOUTHAMPTON
Princess Golf Club
Astwood Cove
Warwick Long Bay
Chaplin Bay
Horseshoe Bay
HAMILTON
North Shore Rd.
Harrington Sound
Castle Harbour
Nonsuch Island
Castle Harbour Golf Club
Harrington Sound Rd.
Tucker's Town
Mid Ocean Golf Club
Flatts
Middle Rd.
SMITH'S
South Shore Rd.
Verdmont
Spittal Pond
South Shore Rd.
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Cruise Ship Dock
Airport
Beach
0
2 mi
0
2 km

Unlike most Caribbean itineraries, on which ships visit ports for a day at most, the many Bermuda-bound ships spend several whole days at the island. To protect its hotel trade, maintain a semblance of order, and keep the island from getting overrun by tourists, the government of Bermuda limits the number of ships that can visit the island on a regular basis during its season, late April through October, when the temperatures hover between 75° and 85°F (24° and 29°C) and extended rainfall is rare.

For the 2009 season, five ships made regular calls: one from Princess and two each from NCL and Royal Caribbean, the latter of which had the supersized *Explorer of the Seas* making regular visits. To accommodate the big ships, the more commodious piers at King's Wharf in the West End are now being used for most ship calls (Hamilton and St. George's can accommodate only medium to small ships).

HOME PORTS FOR THIS REGION **New York/New Jersey** and **Boston** are the main hubs for Bermuda cruises, with ships sailing round-trip on mostly 7-night itineraries. A few ships also sail to Bermuda round-trip from **Baltimore, Norfolk, Charlotte,** and **Philadelphia.** A few more itineraries include Bermuda on **transatlantic crossings** in spring and fall, or visit the island as part of longer itineraries that also include Caribbean ports.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY The official language is **English.** The currency is the **Bermuda dollar** (BD$), which is pegged to the U.S. dollar on an equal basis—BD$1 equals US$1. There's no need to exchange any U.S. money for Bermudian currency.

SHOPPING TIPS While St. George's and the West End Dockyard both have souvenir shops, Hamilton is the center of Bermuda's shopping universe. Here, it's all about English (and some Irish) goodies such as porcelain, crystal, wool clothing, cashmere sweaters, and linens, and it's within walking distance, right outside of the terminal. Don't expect great deals, though—prices in Bermuda are generally on the high side.

1 Attractions Around Bermuda

Because Bermuda is relatively small and easy to get around, and because ships typically spend several days at its ports, you can access the following sights and excursions no matter where you're docked. Depending on traffic, St. George's and Hamilton are about a 20- to 30-minute taxi ride apart, as are Hamilton and King's Wharf (Hamilton is roughly in the middle). It takes about an hour to drive from one end of Bermuda to the other. **Taxis** are metered and relatively inexpensive, starting at $4.80 and going up $1.68 for each additional mile, with a variety of surcharges. Roads around the island are well maintained, but narrow and winding. The **bus** (go to the "Transport" section of www.gov.bm) and **ferry** (www.seaexpress.bm) systems are also user-friendly. Many folks go the **scooter** or **moped** route; rentals are available for $50 to $55 per day at all three ports.

In Flatts Village, about halfway between Hamilton and St. George's, is the **Bermuda Aquarium, Museum & Zoo** (✆ **441/293-2727;** www.bamz.org). There are interactive displays, huge aquariums, and seal feedings throughout the day. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm (last admission at 4pm); admission is $10 for adults and $5 for seniors and children 6 to 12.

The throngs head to the **beaches,** and for good reason. Many are powdery soft and some even pinkish (from crushed shells, corals, and other sea life); they're easily

accessible by taxi or motor scooter from Hamilton and St. George's, and most are free. **Horseshoe Bay,** in Southampton Parish, is our top pick. Though you won't have it to yourself because it's so popular with other tourists, the horseshoe-shaped beach has scenic rocky cliffs at its edges and a vast soft plane of sand in the middle. It's perfect for little kids, as the sand is so silky smooth that it won't irritate delicate little faces. Horseshoe Bay is free and has a snack bar, restrooms, and showers. Lifeguards are on duty here between May and October.

Other beach options include **Warwick Long Bay** (Warwick Parish); **Tobacco Bay Beach** (St. George's Parish), where the water is very calm and the beach is tiny; and **Elbow Beach** (in Paget Parish).

The more adventurous can hop on a scooter and beach-hop among the many unnamed slivers of silky sand tucked into the jagged coastline. If you're itching to see more than Hamilton, and beaches aren't your bag, another great option is hopping on a local ferry (there are terminals in Hamilton and King's Wharf adjacent to the cruise docks). For just a few bucks, you can either ride just for the view of Bermuda's colorful harbors and coastline, or travel between King's Wharf and Hamilton.

It's a treat to climb the 185 steps of the **Gibbs Hill Lighthouse** (Lighthouse Rd., Southampton; halfway btw. King's Wharf and Hamilton), the oldest cast-iron lighthouse in the world. At the top, you'll be rewarded with a panoramic view of Bermuda and its coast. In the base, there's a tearoom serving snacks. It's open daily 9am to 5pm.

The **Bermuda Railway Trail** has about 29km (18 miles) of trails divided into easy-to-explore sections. It was created along the course of the old Bermuda Railway, which stretched a total of 34km (21 miles) and served the island from 1931 to 1948, until the automobile was introduced. Armed with a copy of the *Bermuda Railway Trail Map and Guide,* available at the various visitor centers in and right outside the cruise terminals, you can set out on your own expedition via foot or bicycle (most of the moped/scooter rental agencies have bicycles as well). Most of the trail winds along a car-free route, and there is a section of trail in St. George's and near Hamilton.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

There's a lot you can do independently, from beach hopping to shopping and walking and tram-style tours; however, if you crave a guide to narrate the highlights, or want to do something active such as snorkel or bike ride, the ships' organized tours are your best bet. The sampling of tours below are generally offered from King's Wharf, Hamilton, and St. George's.

Railway Trail Cruise & Bike Tour ($75, 3 hr.): Take a scenic coastal cruise to the rural West End, where you'll hop on a 21-speed bike. Pedal along the path where the original Bermuda Railway once ran on narrow-gauge tracks. The tracks are gone, but a trail remains behind. This excursion is a great opportunity to get views of the ocean and the island's lush gardens and bird life. The flat route covers 8km to 13km (5–8 miles).

Snorkeling Trip ($68, 3 hr.): Board a boat and motor out to a snorkeling spot near the West End as the captain talks to passengers about Bermuda history and customs. Then, after an hour or so of snorkeling, the fun begins: The music is turned on, the dancing starts, and the bar opens as the boat heads back to port.

Coral Reef Glass-Bottom Boat Cruise ($46, 2 hr.): See the coral reefs and colorful fish living in Bermuda's waters; then view one of Bermuda's famous shipwrecks and enjoy a rum swizzle from a fully stocked bar.

Golf Excursion ($75+, half-day): Excursions include tee times for 18 holes at challenging courses such as Mid Ocean Golf Club, among the best in the world; Riddells Bay Golf & Country Club, a veritable golfing institution built in 1922; Port Royal Golf Course; and St. George's Golf Club, designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr. A taxi to and from the courses may be extra and club rental is about $30 extra, but carts are included. The golf excursions are often sold directly through an onboard golf pro who organizes lessons on the ship, too.

2 King's Wharf

Now Bermuda's main port, historic King's Wharf in the West End is the only one of the country's three ports with the facilities to handle today's megaships (such as Royal Caribbean's 3,114-passenger Voyager-class vessels). It's located in the extreme northwest of Bermuda on Ireland Island in Sandys Parish, one of Bermuda's six main islands. The wharf is part of the historic **Royal Naval Dockyard** fortress complex, built by the British in the early 1800s as protection from potential attacks by America.

COMING ASHORE Ships tie up at docks within walking distance of the Bermuda Maritime Museum (see below). At press time, a new pier was scheduled to open at King's Wharf in late 2009, enabling two or three megaships to dock there at one time.

GETTING AROUND You can walk to the main attraction here, the Royal Naval Dockyard military fortress and its Maritime Museum (see below), or if you're beach-bound or heading for a day of golf, **taxis** line up at the docks and a ferry terminal nearby. (See section 1, "Attractions Around Bermuda," above.)

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Just steps from the ships is the **Royal Naval Dockyard,** a sprawling, 6-acre 19th-century fortress constructed with convict labor. It was used by the British Navy until 1951 as a strategic dockyard. Today, it's a major tourist attraction whose centerpiece is the **Bermuda Maritime Museum** (✆ **441/234-1418;** www.bmm.bm), the most important and extensive museum on the island. Exhibits are housed in six large halls within the complex, and the displays all relate to Bermuda's long connection with the sea, from Spanish exploration to 20th-century ocean liners. You can have a look at maps, ship models, and such artifacts as gold bars, pottery, jewelry, and silver coins recovered from 16th- and 17th-century shipwrecks such as the *Sea Venture.* Open daily from 9:30am to 5pm (last admission at 4pm); admission is $10 adults, $5 kids. The Royal Naval Dockyard complex also includes restaurants, shops, an art gallery, and a crafts market. Nearby is a **marina** where you can sign up for parasailing or rent a boat.

3 Hamilton

Hamilton was once known as the "Show Window of the British Empire." It has been the capital of Bermuda since 1815, when it replaced St. George's. Today, it's the economic hub of the island.

COMING ASHORE Only medium and small ships (such as Regent's *Seven Seas Navigator*) dock in Hamilton. Ships tie up at piers smack-dab in the middle of town. The terminal funnels guests into the main shopping drag on Front Street.

GETTING AROUND You can walk to all of the shops and department stores in town, or take a walking tour for a more historic perspective. Walking-tour maps are available in the terminal. If you're beach-bound or heading for a day of golf or some other attraction, there are **taxis** lined up outside the terminal. For old-timey town tours, **horse-drawn carriages** wait outside the terminal.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

A walking tour is a great option. Pick up a map in the cruise terminal and you're on your leisurely way to visiting sights that range from a 200-year-old post office to exhibits in the Bermuda Historical Society Museum. If a relaxing lunch on the waterfront sounds appealing, stroll on over to the waterside **Poinciana Terrace at the Waterloo House,** on Pitts Bay Road (✆ **441/295-4480;** www.waterloohouse.com), an elegant property within walking distance of the ship docks. Lunch is served on the outdoor patio overlooking the colorful and idyllic harbor, and many snazzy-looking businesspeople dine here (so dress the part, which means T-shirts and flip-flops will look out of place). If it's on the menu, the fish chowder, laced with rum and sherry peppers, is a local favorite and a great choice. Lunch costs around $30.

Consider a visit to the **Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute** (✆ **441/292-7219;** www.buei.org); it's adjacent to the Hamilton docks near the roundabout on East Broadway. There are two floors of interactive exhibits about the ocean, plus the highlight: a capsule that simulates a 3,600m (11,800-ft.) dive below the ocean's surface (it accommodates 21 people at a time). Open 9am to 5pm Monday through Friday, 10am to 5pm Saturday and Sunday (last admission is 3pm); admission is $11 for adults and $5.50 for kids 7 to 16.

4 St. George's

Quaint and historic, St. George's was the second English town established in the New World, after Jamestown in Virginia. King's Square, also called Market Square or the King's Parade, is the center of life here. But because most ships are too big to dock here, this charming little town is visited only by those taking a tour or willing to using a bus, ferry, or taxi to reach it (which does help keep the number of visitors down).

COMING ASHORE Cruise ships tie up at the edge of the small town. For 2009, only one smallish ship was scheduled for regular calls to St. George's.

GETTING AROUND You can walk to a handful of historic attractions (see below), or if you're beach-bound or heading for a day of golf or some other attraction, you'll be able to find a **taxi** at the dock.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

A great option is grabbing a free walking-tour map from the tourism office in King's Square, just steps from your ship. Sights on the tour include **Ordnance Island,** a tiny piece of land that juts into the harbor just in front of the dock, where a replica of *Deliverance*—the vessel that carried the shipwrecked *Sea Venture* passengers on to Virginia—stands. Don't miss a quick stop at **St. Peter's Church,** on Duke of York Street, believed to be the oldest Anglican place of worship in the Western Hemisphere; some headstones in the cemetery date back 300 years, and the present church was built in 1713. The oldest stone building in Bermuda, the **Old State House,** built about 1620, sits at the top of King Street and was once the home of the Bermuda Parliament. At

the intersection of Featherbed Alley and Duke of Kent Street, **St. George's Historical Society Museum** houses a collection of Bermudian historic artifacts and cedar furniture.

A mile or so from King's Square in St. George's (many walk it, some hop in taxis), overlooking the beach where the shipwrecked crew of the *Sea Venture* came ashore in 1609, is **Fort St. Catherine,** which you'll want to see. Completed in 1614, and reconstructed several times after, it was named for the patron saint of wheelwrights and carpenters. The fortress houses a museum, with several worthwhile exhibits. Admission costs $5 for adults and $2 for kids.

14

Hawaii

Honeymooners flock here for a reason: The place is gorgeous and culturally vibrant. Even *The Brady Bunch* schlepped Alice and the six kids to Hawaii (you didn't see them going to Disney World, did you?). However, it's not all about surfer boys and hula girls. The diverse landscape on this cluster of islands in the Pacific ranges from fuming volcanoes to crashing surf, serene beaches, and lush jungles. In a place where the weather really is perfect all the time, it's no surprise that the locals are so mellow. Learn to surf, go to a luau, snooze on the sand, float in warm water surrounded by rainbow-colored tropical fish, enjoy the local coffee, or check out the native Hawaiian culture, of which the locals are fiercely proud. The past survives alongside the modern world in a vibrant arts scene, which includes traditional Polynesian dance and music, as well as painting, sculpture, and crafts. You'll also likely get a glimpse of age-old customs such as outrigger canoe races, the most popular sport in all of Hawaii, and, of course, the ubiquitous ukulele playing.

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) has one year-round ship that cruises among the islands round-trip from Honolulu (down from a high of four ships, which NCL realized was too many for the market). Thanks to some intense lobbying in Congress a few years back, NCL's Hawaii vessel sails under the U.S. flag, which means the ship can concentrate solely on the islands and doesn't have to throw in a call to a foreign port (a requirement for foreign-flagged vessels). In isolated Hawaii, this is a real advantage and no other competing line currently has it (see NCL review on p. 197 for details).

Aside from NCL's cruises, other ships typically stop in the islands in April, May, September, and October. The four main ports here are **Oahu,** where you'll find the famous Waikiki Beach; **Maui,** home of the historic town of Lahaina; **Kauai,** the most natural and undeveloped of the four; and Kona and Hilo on the **Big Island,** home of the state's famous volcanoes, including Mauna Kea and the still-active Kilauea.

HOME PORTS FOR THIS REGION **Honolulu,** on Oahu, is the main hub for inter-island cruises. Foreign-flagged vessels generally sail from the mainland—from ports such as **Ensenada** (Mexico), **San Diego, Seattle,** and/or **Vancouver**—hitting the Hawaiian Islands as they cruise between seasons in the Caribbean and Alaska.

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY While **English** is the official language, it is infused with a few native **Hawaiian** words, including the customary greeting, *aloha.* (Contrary to what you may believe, "Book 'em, Danno" is not actually a native phrase.) The **U.S. dollar** is the official currency.

1 Oahu

Oahu is a relatively small island, measuring 26 miles long and some 44 miles across at its widest, totaling 597 square miles of land, with 112 miles of coastline. Everyone ventures to Oahu seeking a different experience. Some talk about wanting to find the "real" Hawaii, some are looking for heart-pounding adventure, some yearn for the relaxing and healing powers of the islands, and others are drawn by Hawaii's aloha spirit, where kindness and friendliness prevail.

All kinds of memorable experiences can be yours here. Imagine yourself sitting in a kayak watching the brilliant colors of dawn etched across the sky; sipping a mai tai while taking in sweeping views of the south shore and the Waianae Mountains; battling a magnificent game fish on a high-tech sport-fishing boat; or listening to melodic voices chant the stories of a proud people and a proud culture that was overthrown little more than a century ago. By far the most social of the islands, Oahu has some of the best shopping and most fashionable promenade strips, as well as beautiful beaches with all the classic ingredients: tall palms, white sand, gentle surf, and plenty of sunshine. **Waikiki Beach** offers the best of both worlds. Its trendy eateries, high-end hotels, and ritzy shops collide with a stunning beachfront. It's like Rodeo Drive meets South Beach, only better.

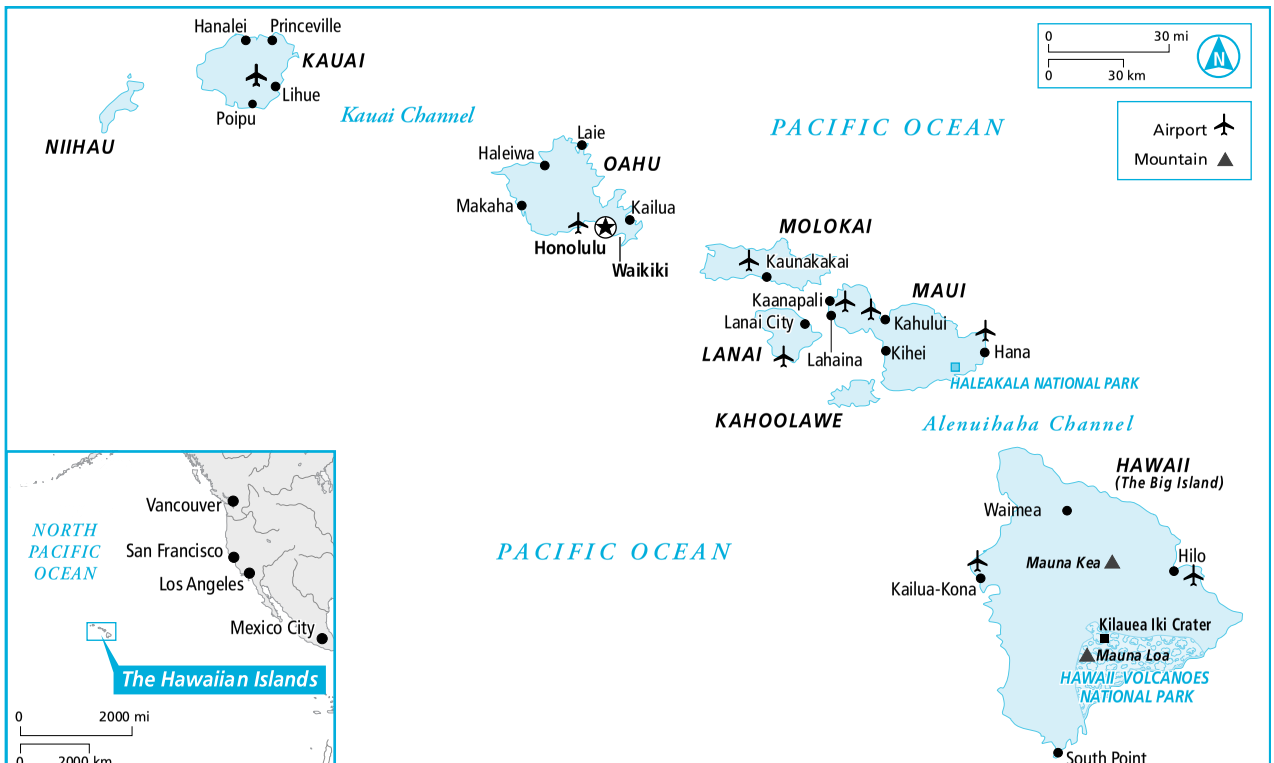
COMING ASHORE Ships dock at the Port of Honolulu, Pier 10, alongside the festive, well-appointed **Aloha Tower Marketplace** in Honolulu. Half shopping center, half cruise pier and promenade, this waterfront two-level mall centers around a five-story tower built in the 1920s. It's a landmark focal point that can easily be spotted around town. The pier can accommodate two ships. At press time, a new $25-million cruise terminal was in the planning stages, slated for the former industrial Pier 2 nearby. This pier will accommodate an additional cruise ship, bringing the total capacity in Honolulu to three.

GETTING AROUND Aloha Tower is a convenient jumping-off point for walking tours of the downtown historic sites, and it's just a short taxi ride to nearby beaches, shopping, and museums. **Taxis** queue up at the information booth near the adjacent parking area; a ride to Ala Moana Beach costs about $10 for up to five people. If you miss out, call **City Taxi** (✆ **808/524-2121**) or hop on the San Francisco–style open-air trolley called **Waikiki Trolley** (✆ **800/824-8804** or 808/593-2822; www.waikikitrolley.com), which runs to Ala Moana shopping center, Ala Moana Beach, and downtown. **TheBus** (✆ **808/848-5555;** www.thebus.org) leaves every 30 minutes or so from in front of the Maritime Center and stops at several locations. You can also pick up a **rental car** at the nearby airport, but with so many other transportation options, it's unnecessary (and the one-way road system can be confusing).

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Pearl Harbor and USS *Missouri* ($72 adults, $60 children, 6½ hr.): For those old enough to remember World War II and those who can't forget 9/11, a tour of Pearl Harbor and the USS *Missouri* is a deeply moving experience.

Grand Circle Island Tour ($99 adults, $79 children, 7 hr.): Given the island's immense natural beauty, a drive around Oahu is time well spent (make sure to bring your camera with you on the bus!). Views from inside Diamond Head Crater, an extinct volcano, rival those of the breathtaking carved shoreline at Hanauma Bay or the sweeping coastal vistas from Pali Lookout. Lunch is included.



The Hawaiian Islands

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Right next to the pier is the **Hawaii Maritime Center** (✆ **808/536-6373;** www.bishopmuseum.org/exhibits/hmc/hmc.html), where you can learn about Hawaii's maritime history and view artifacts from the days of sailing, whaling, yachting, and Matson Line cruising. Admission is $8.50 for adults, $7 seniors, $5.50 for children (ages 4–12), and free for kids 3 and under.

A short walk up Richards Street, across Nimitz Highway, brings you into downtown Honolulu. If you go right on South King Street, you'll come to a statue of **King Kamehameha I,** the famed Hawaiian ruler. Across the street, at the corner of South King and Richards streets, stands **Iolani Palace** (✆ **808/522-0832;** www.iolanipalace.org), America's only royal residence, where Hawaii's last monarch ruled until 1893. The building of this Italian Renaissance palace, which had electricity before both the White House and Buckingham Palace, nearly bankrupted the kingdom. Admission is for the self-guided gallery tours is $6 adults and $3 for children ages 5 to 12; if you would like the 45-minute audio tours (a self-guided tour with a prerecorded audio hookup), the fee is $13 adults and $5 children ages 5 to 12. We recommend the docent-guided tour, which takes places 9am to 11:15am and costs $20 for adults and $5 for children ages 5 to 12 (kids 4 and under admitted only in the gallery). The palace is open Tuesday through Saturday. One block up King Street, **Kawaiahao Church,** 957 Punchbowl St. (✆ **808/522-1333**), was the first stone church built on Oahu and is home to a royal burial ground. If you're lucky enough to be there on Sunday, there's a service in Hawaiian (with divine singing) at 9am. Admission is free (though donations are happily accepted). Next door is the **Mission House Museum,** 553 S. King St. (✆ **808/531-0481;** www.missionhouses.org), a cute old mission house open for tours Tuesday through Saturday. Admission is $10 adults, $8 seniors, $6 kids (6 years to college-age), free for kids 5 and under; tickets must be purchased in advance. Guided tours take place at 11am, 1pm, and 2:45pm.

Walk 5 blocks west from the museum along South King Street and you'll come to America's oldest **Chinatown.** Selling everything from flower leis to exotic fruits and vegetables, this crowded market area is a haggler's dream.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

Just north of Lunalilo Freeway at the end of Puowaina Drive is **Punchbowl Crater,** which houses the **National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific** (✆ **808/532-3720;** www.interment.net/data/us/hi/oahu/natmem/index.htm). This natural landscape feature, called "hill of sacrifice" by early Hawaiians, now serves as a burial ground for 3,500 victims of war. Admission is free.

To really learn about the history of Hawaii and its people, drop in at the **Bishop Museum,** 1525 Bernice St. (✆ **808/847-3511;** www.bishopmuseum.org). Created in 1889, and now the State Museum of Natural and Cultural History, this Victorian building houses an extensive collection of artifacts from ancient Polynesians, Hawaiian royalty, turn-of-the-20th-century immigrants, and more. Daily cultural shows and tours enrich the experience. It's well worth it to make time for the **Na Mea Makamae Tour** (the story of the creation of the museum and the treasures of the Hawaiian culture) at 10am and 12:30pm; the **Na Hulu Alii** tour (tour of the elaborate feather artwork of ancient Hawaiians) at 10:30am and 1:30pm; the **Plants of Paradise Garden Tour** at 11:30am; and **Meet Me at the Hot Spot—Lava Melting Demo** at noon and 2pm. Don't miss the daily shows in the museum's planetarium: **The Sky Tonight** at 11:30am; **Explorers of Mauna Kea** at 3:30pm; and (our favorite) **Explorers of**

Polynesia at 1:30pm. Admission to the Bishop Museum is $16 adults, $13 seniors and kids ages 4 to 12.

At **Pearl Harbor** (✆ **808/422-0561**), you can't miss the **USS *Arizona* Memorial** (✆ **808/422-2771** for recorded info or 808/422-2771; www.nps.gov/usar), built right above the shallow water where the ship was sunk on December 7, 1941, or the battleship **USS *Missouri*** (✆ **877/MIGHTYMO** [644-4896] or 808/423-2263; www.ussmissouri.com), on the decks of which Japan surrendered to the Allies on September 2, 1945. Admission to the *Arizona* is free. Tickets for the *Missouri* are $16 for adults, $8 for children ages 4 to 12, plus additional fees for guided tours. What you may not notice, but should, is the **USS *Bowfin* Submarine Museum and Park** (✆ **808/423-1341;** www.bowfin.org). This National Historic Landmark provides a rare glimpse into the thrill and danger of life aboard a submarine. The self-guided audio tour is narrated by the vessel's last captain, who takes you through the cramped quarters where men slept nose to nose with torpedoes, bathed in miniscule showers, and took turns dining in the tiny galley. This tour is not recommended for people with claustrophobia or those who have difficulty going up or down ladders. Admission is $10 adults, $7 seniors, $4 kids ages 4 to 12.

BEACHES

Nearby **Ala Moana Beach Park,** on Ala Moana Park Drive, has white sand and calm warm water—it's perfect for families. Like most beaches in Hawaii, it's free and uncrowded, especially on weekdays. It has a paved walkway and grassy areas where you can lounge or picnic under a tree. A taxi ride to here costs about $10 from the port, or you can catch a bus from the Maritime Center for $2 or so (at press time, Honolulu was considering raising fare to $2.25). For more information call ✆ **808/848-5555** or log on to www.thebus.org. Buses also allow access to all the beaches below.

A few miles south is the famous **Waikiki Beach.** One-way taxi fare will run about $18. This beach is popular with locals, who will often occupy the cement picnic tables under open-air shelters and play chess or just watch the action. While surprisingly small, it is favored for surfing, suntanning, or just people-watching. Restrooms, showers, and beach rentals are all to be had at the far end near Kapiolani Park.

Sandy Beach, on the eastern tip of the island, is a favorite spot for boogie boarding. While the white crashing surf may look appealing, take a moment to read the numerous warning signs, and exercise great care—lifeguards do more beach rescues here than anywhere else. If a red flag is flying, it means the surf is too dangerous to enter. A taxi will cost between $50 and $70 each way; keep in mind that many taxis can accommodate six or eight passengers, so the fare can be shared.

Another popular beach is **Hanauma Bay,** nestled in a volcanic crater just before Sandy Beach. Depending on where your ship docks, taxi fare to Hanauma Bay can cost about $45 to $50. You approach the beach from above and pass through the Marine Education Center, which also provides a motorized tram that takes you down the steep road to the beach and back for $1 round-trip. There's a $5 entrance fee; the beach is closed Tuesday. There is also a shuttle ($2 or $2.25 each way) from Waikiki to Hanauma Bay, which runs every half-hour between 9am and 1pm, with stops at city bus stops and several hotels.

SHOPPING

The majority of stores in **Aloha Tower** cater to tourists and sell uniquely Hawaiian wares. Some fine carved wood and bark cloth can be found at a few shops on the

If You're Embarking in Honolulu . . .

WHERE TO STAY In the minds of many, Oahu and its most famous city, Honolulu, are synonymous. Honolulu's best-known neighborhood, Waikiki, is actually pretty small, but its spectacular beach and array of resort hotels are the attractions that originally put Hawaii on the tourist map. The choices for accommodations are nearly limitless, ranging from budget to ultraluxury.

For families watching their wallets, there are nearly a dozen **Outrigger and Ohana Hotels** that offer clean and affordable lodging in Waikiki, including **Ohana Waikiki West,** 2330 Kuhio Ave. (✆ **808/922-5022;** www.ohanahotels.com), 2 blocks from Waikiki Beach. Downside? It's on a very busy part of Kuhio Avenue. But rooms can go as low as $89 per night in the off season. To escape the hustle and bustle, head over to the **Hawaiiana Hotel,** 260 Beachwalk (✆ **808/923-3811;** www.hawaiianahotelatwaikiki.com), or next door to the **Breakers,** 250 Beachwalk (✆ **808/923-3181**). Both properties have spacious motel-style rooms that surround a tranquil pool and garden; rates start at about $125 double at the Hawaiian and $130 at the Breakers.

Trendy visitors should check into the **Aston Waikiki Beach Hotel,** 2570 Kalakaua Ave. (✆ **866/77-HAWAII** [774-2924]; www.astonhotels.com), where New York City chic meets Miami cool. Check out the surfboards adorning the walls of the lobby. Rates for a standard room start as low as $140 double. If it's a Victorian setting you crave, don't miss the **Moana Surfrider,** A Westin Resort & Spa, 2365 Kalakaua Ave. (✆ **808/922-3111;** www.moana-surfrider.com). Lovingly referred to as the first lady of Waikiki, this grand hotel debuted in 1901 as the first true resort on the island and

second level. For those who like to indulge in serious window-shopping, head to **Kalakaua Avenue** at Waikiki Beach, where you can find everything from Coach bags to board shorts, all on a bustling strip complete with statues, reflecting pools, street performers, and, at dusk, flaming tiki torches and alfresco dining. To see some of the island's handmade artwork, drop into the **Nohea Gallery,** in the lobby of the Moana Surfrider, A Westin Resort & Spa, 2365 Kalakaua Ave. (✆ **808/922-3111;** www.moana-surfrider.com).

2 Kauai

Kauai ranks right up there with Bora Bora, Huahine, and Rarotonga on any list of the world's most spectacular islands. All the elements are here: moody rainforests, majestic cliffs, jagged peaks, emerald valleys, palm trees swaying in the breeze, daily rainbows, and some of the most spectacular beaches you'll find anywhere. Soft tropical air, sunrise bird song, essences of ginger and plumeria, golden sunsets, sparkling waterfalls—you don't just go to Kauai, you absorb it with all of your senses. It may get more than its fair share of tropical downpours, but that's what makes it so lush and green—and creates an abundance of rainbows.

still retains the same elegance and charm it started with 100 years ago. Rates for a standard city-view room start at $430 double.

WHERE TO DINE On the second floor of the Aston Waikiki Beach Hotel, **Tiki's Grill and Bar,** 2570 Kalakaua Ave. (✆ **808/923-TIKI** [923-8454]; www.tikisgrill.com), is a restaurant and open-air tiki bar that overlooks the promenade and beach. The live music plays second fiddle to the sunset views and trendy crowd. The cuisine is good ol' American with a touch of Pacific Rim, apparent in all the fish dishes. Tiki's signature dish is king salmon glazed with lemon grass beurre blanc. Main courses at lunch run $12 to $20 and at dinner $26 to $39.

Surprisingly popular is the **Cheesecake Factory,** the Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center (✆ **808/924-5001**). Serving its standard plethora of trendy dishes in heaping portions, the alfresco dining and central location mean there's usually a wait for a table. Main courses cost $16 to $32.

With an equally long wait, but lower price tag, **Cheeseburger in Paradise,** 2500 Kalakaua Ave. (✆ **808/923-3731**), delivers exactly that. Served in a basket, with a side of fries, the burgers come in nearly every incarnation, including chili, guacamole, bacon, and "Island Style," with a slice of grilled Maui pineapple. There are also tasty salads and veggie or tofu burgers, with or without cheese. Main courses average $9 to $15.

For a serene outdoor dining experience, try dinner on the **Banyan Veranda,** at the Moana Surfrider, A Westin Resort & Spa (see "Where to Stay," above). Dinner is available nightly from 5:30 to 9pm. Afternoon tea is served Monday through Saturday from 1 to 4pm and Sunday from 3 to 4pm.

Kauai is essentially a single large shield volcano that rises 3 miles above the sea floor. The island lies 90 miles across the open ocean from Oahu, but it seems at least a half-century removed in time. It's often called "the separate kingdom" because it stood alone and resisted King Kamehameha's efforts to unite Hawaii. In the end, a royal kidnapping was required to take the Garden Isle: After King Kamehameha died, his son, Liholiho, ascended the throne. He gained control of Kauai by luring Kauai's king, Kaumualii, aboard the royal yacht and then sailing to Oahu; once there, Kaumualii was forced to marry Kaahumanu, Kamehameha's widow, thereby uniting the islands.

A Kauai rule is that no building may exceed the height of a coconut tree—between three and four stories. As a result, the island itself, not its palatial beach hotels, is the attention grabber. There are no opulent shopping malls here, but what Kauai lacks in glitz, it more than makes up for in sheer natural splendor, with verdant jungles, the endless succession of spectacular beaches, the grandeur of Waimea Canyon, and the drama of the Napali Coast. Many Hollywood movies were filmed here, including *Raiders of the Lost Ark; Six Days, Seven Nights;* and parts of all three *Jurassic Park* films.

COMING ASHORE About the only fun thing to do at **Nawiliwili Harbor** is pronounce the name (*nah*-willy-willy). The port can accommodate two ships at a time: one at a pier, and one anchored with a short tender ride. Some of the small local malls

have free shuttle buses, but the real attraction is the phenomenal beach that is tucked quietly behind the Anchor Cove shopping mall, less than a mile from the pier.

GETTING AROUND Taxis from the **Kauai Taxi Company** (✆ **808/246-9554**) and other companies typically meet cruise ships at the pier. Rates are $2.50 for the first ⅛ mile, plus $2.40 for each additional mile.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Jungle Mountain Trek, Wagon & Zip Line Adventure ($153 adults, $120 children, 7 hr.): Paddle a kayak through a mangrove forest, soar across a jungle stream on a high-wire zipline, swing from a rope swing, leap off a waterfall, and more on this action-packed all-day adventure. This excursion takes you along jungle trails to some of the most scenic waterfalls and ponds in the area. The beauty of the surrounding mountains is sublime, and the guides do a colorful retelling of ancient folklore while you ride in a tractor-pulled wagon through a green valley surrounded by ridges and peaks that served as inspiration for the folklore. Be sure to wear comfortable walking shoes; bring a swimsuit and a towel, too. Lunch is served on a treehouse platform near a waterfall.

Waimea River & Fern Grotto ($55 adults, $45 children, 3½ hr.): This excursion takes you to some of the most breathtaking and contrasting natural wonders of Kauai. First, visit the jagged red-earth cliffs and canyons of Waimea, the "Grand Canyon of the Pacific," whose depth measures 2,587 feet. Once you've had enough time to marvel at the view (don't forget a camera!), you're off via riverboat to explore the verdant green valley of Fern Grotto. Break in your shoes before you take this excursion. Lunch is included.

Tubing the Ditch ($135, 3 hr.): Travel to a former sugar cane plantation in Kauai's interior and the headwaters of the Hanamaulu Ditch system, a series of open ditches, tunnels, and flumes that once provided irrigation for the farmlands. There you'll get an inner tube, be outfitted with helmet lamps, and begin your float trip through the tunnels. Not for the claustrophobic!

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

A few shopping malls are a short walk from the pier (see "Shopping," below) and a sunny beach is even closer still (see "Beaches," below). Otherwise, you'll need wheels of one sort or another.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

To understand life in a small town built around a sugar plantation, head to **Old Koloa Town.** This tiny collection of small wooden buildings, now turned into shops and restaurants, was the new home for waves of immigrants who came to work on the sugar plantations. In the center of town is a small history center that houses a few artifacts from the turn of the 20th century. Plaques on each building describe the original purpose and history. It's about an hour's drive from the harbor, so this is a good bet only for those who've rented wheels.

A visit to the **Allerton and McBryde Gardens** of the **National Tropical Botanical Garden,** Lawai Road, across the street from Spouting Horn, Poipu (✆ **808/742-2623;** www.ntbg.org), will leave you breathless as you wander amid the intoxicating array of tropical flowers and fragrances. Take a self-guided tour of McBryde Garden Monday through Saturday 9am to 4pm ($20 adults, $10 kids 6–12), or

better yet, the guided tour of Allerton Garden Monday through Saturday at 9 and 10am, and 1 and 2pm ($45 adults, $20 children 10–12), to learn about the many useful and culturally significant plants growing in this green oasis. Trams run Monday through Saturday from 9:30am to 2:30pm.

BEACHES

Nestled just behind the Anchor Cove shopping center, less than a mile from the pier, is **Kalapaki Beach.** Used by locals and tourists, this strip of natural beauty seems out of place next to the parking lot and strip mall. Protected by a jetty and patrolled by lifeguards, the beach is safe for swimming and ideal for families with children. Restrooms are available at the nearby restaurants, where you can also change and grab a snack.

Beautiful **Poipu Beach** can be reached by heading south from the port along Hwy. 50 for about 15 miles. This romantic spot has crystal-blue water, pure white sand, palm trees, and even a patch of grass big enough for a game of Frisbee. At the eastern end is a small beach with lava rocks and moderate surf, while to the west, you'll see a string of small crescent beaches. Watch for rare and endangered Hawaiian monk seals that occasionally haul out and lounge on the sand. While seemingly tame, they are dangerous to approach and protected by law. In addition to lifeguards, there are showers, restrooms, and covered picnic areas. A taxi here costs about $38 each way.

Heading north on Hwy. 56, up the Coconut Coast to the North Shore is **Kee Beach,** a favorite among locals. At the northern tip is a deep but calm swimming area in summer, though just off to the left (when facing the sea) are some dangerous and very sharp rocks just beyond the surf, so take care before you rush in. There are no lifeguards, so stay in the same swimming area as everyone else. If no one is in the water, it is usually for good reason. A taxi runs about $130 each way; but many cars can carry up to six passengers, so you can share the cost with some of your shipmates.

SHOPPING

At the **Anchor Cove** shopping center, you can purchase some of the most breathtaking pearl jewelry this side of Asia. **South Pacific Gallery** stocks a wide variety of locally crafted jewelry and art. For spectacular artwork made out of glass, go north on Kuhio Highway and stop in at **Kela's Glass Gallery,** 4-1354 Kuhio Hwy., Kapaa (✆ **888/255-3527** or 808/822-4527). Along the Coconut Coast is the **Yellowfish Trading Company,** in the town of Hanalei (✆ **808/826-1227**), where kitschy Hawaiiana hearkens back to the 1950s. Also in Hanalei are **Lotus Gallery** (✆ **808/828-9898**), a showstopper for lovers of antiques and designer jewelry, and **Ola's,** by the Hanalei River on the Kuhio Highway (Hwy. 560) after the bridge and before the main part of Hanalei town (✆ **808/826-6937**), where you will find an unique selection of island crafts from one-of-a-kind furniture (they'll ship it home for you) to hand-blown glass, exquisite jewelry, and many other fine works.

3 Maui

Maui, also called the Valley Isle, is just a small dot in the vast Pacific Ocean, but it has the potential to allow visitors unforgettable experiences: floating weightless through rainbows of tropical fish, standing atop a 10,000-foot volcano and watching the sunrise color the sky, listening to the raindrops in a bamboo forest, and sunning on idyllic beaches. The island is also packed with interesting cultural sights and colorful

history. Here, you can set foot on the spot where ancient Hawaiian royalty and priests once walked, gathered, and worshipped. Later, at the turn of the 20th century, it became a bustling home to native Hawaiians, immigrants, and missionaries. Cruise ships call on two ports, **Kahului** and **Lahaina.**

KAHULUI

COMING ASHORE Coming ashore at the **Port of Kahului,** an industrial port that can accommodate one cruise ship at a time, may leave you less than inspired. Don't bother braving the maze of roads that weave around containers and warehouses—all that lies beyond in the immediate vicinity are strip malls and roads. It's best to hop in a taxi to explore the island or sign up for one of the shore excursions.

GETTING AROUND **Taxis,** as well as **shuttle buses,** line up in an orderly fashion under large, well-marked signs at the pier. If for some reason you don't see one, try **Sunshine Cabs of Maui** (✆ **800/922-8294** or 808/879-2220) or **Islandwide Taxi and Tours** (✆ **808/874-TAXI** [874-8294]). Rates are $3.50 for the first ⅛ mile, plus $3 for each additional mile.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Haleakala Crater at Sunrise ($75, 6 hr.): Don't miss this chance to experience the dramatic landscape of a dormant volcano. Haleakala, whose vast crater measures 7½ by 2½ miles and is 3,000 feet deep, last erupted in 1790. As you ascend, the terrain changes from forest to scrub to a seemingly barren wasteland near the top. Surprisingly, it is here among the lava rocks and chilly slopes that some of Hawaii's most rare and endangered species of plants and animals can be found. Bring a sweater, as temperatures at the top can sink as low as 40°F (4°C).

Ocean Center & Iao Valley ($53 adults, $45 children, 3½ hr.): This tour combines a visit to a modern interactive aquarium that displays Hawaii's indigenous marine life with a visit to Iao Valley, a lush state park and sacred site of religious and cultural significance for ancient Hawaiians.

Maui Whale-Watch ($78 adults, $55 children, 3 hr.): Some things have to be seen in person, and a breaching whale is one of them. The beauty and grace of these behemoths as they glide between our world and theirs is not to be missed. And, with such an abundance of whales here (about a third of all Pacific whales migrate here for the winter), your chances of seeing one are good (though not absolute). A guide from the Pacific Whale Foundation shares insights into the animals' behavior as you "listen in" to the mammals' conversation via underwater hydrophones. ***Note:*** This tour is usually offered from mid-December to April only.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

The Kahului harbor functions as a working cargo port in addition to serving cruise ships, and the area around the dock is the residential center of the island—lots of subdivisions, a few shopping centers, and not much else. For the most part, you'll need to take a taxi to see the sights, or take a shore excursion. The exception to that rule is the **Kanaha Wildlife Sanctuary,** Haleakala Highway Extension and Hana Highway (✆ **808/984-8100**), situated within walking distance of the dock, next to Maui's busiest intersection and across from Costco and Kmart in Kahului's new business park. Look for the parking area off Haleakala Highway Extension (behind the mall, across the Hana Hwy. from Cutter Automotive), and you'll find a 50-foot trail that

meanders along the shore to a shade shelter and lookout. Look for the sign proclaiming this the permanent home of the endangered black-neck Hawaiian stilt, whose population is now down to about 1,000. Naturalists say this is also a good place to see endangered Hawaiian Koloa ducks, stilts, coots, and other migrating shorebirds.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

Next door to the town of Kahului is **Wailuku,** the county seat, worth a visit for a little antiquing and a visit to the **Bailey House Museum,** 2375-A Main St. (✆ **808/244-3326;** www.mauimuseum.org). Missionary and sugar planter Edward Bailey's 1833 home, an architectural hybrid of stones laid by Hawaiian craftsmen and timbers joined in a display of Yankee ingenuity, is a treasure trove of Hawaiiana. Inside, you'll find an eclectic collection, from precontact artifacts like scary temple images, dog-tooth necklaces, and a rare lei made of tree-snail shells to latter-day relics like Duke Kahanamoku's 1919 redwood surfboard and a koa-wood table given to President Ulysses S. Grant, who refused it because he couldn't accept gifts from foreign countries. There's also a gallery devoted to a few of Bailey's landscapes, painted from 1866 to 1896, which capture on canvas a Maui we can only imagine today. Admission is $7 for adults, $5 for seniors, and $2 for children 7 to 12; closed Sunday.

A couple of miles north of Wailuku, where the little plantation houses stop and the road climbs ever higher, Maui's true nature is revealed. The transition from suburban sprawl to raw nature is so abrupt that most people who drive up into the valley don't realize they're suddenly in a rainforest. The moist, cool air and the shade are a welcome comfort after the hot tropic sun. This is **Iao Valley,** a 6¼-acre state park whose nature, history, and beauty have been enjoyed by millions of people from around the world for more than a century. Iao ("Supreme Light") Valley, 10 miles long and encompassing 4,000 acres, is the eroded volcanic caldera of the West Maui Mountains. The head of the valley is a broad circular amphitheater where four major streams converge into Iao Stream. At the back of the amphitheater is rain-drenched Puu Kukui, the West Maui Mountains' highest point. No other Hawaiian valley lets you go from seacoast to rainforest so easily. This peaceful valley, full of tropical plants, rainbows, waterfalls, swimming holes, and hiking trails, is a place of solitude, reflection, and escape for residents and visitors alike.

The main attraction is the feature known as **Iao Needle,** an erosional remnant consisting of basalt dikes. This phallic rock juts an impressive 2,250 feet above sea level. Youngsters play in **Iao Stream,** a peaceful brook that belies its bloody history. In 1790, King Kamehameha the Great and his men engaged in the battle of Iao Valley to gain control of Maui. When the battle ended, so many bodies blocked Iao Stream that the battle site was named Kepaniwai, or "damming of the waters." An architectural heritage park of Hawaiian, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, and New England–style houses stands in harmony by Iao Stream at **Kepaniwai Heritage Garden.** This is a good picnic spot, with plenty of tables and benches. You can see ferns, banana trees, and other native and exotic plants in the **Iao Valley Botanic Garden** along the stream.

About 3 miles south of Wailuku lies the tiny, one-street village of Waikapu, which has two attractions that are worth a peek. Relive Maui's past by taking a 40-minute narrated tram ride around fields of pineapple, sugar cane, and papaya trees at **Maui Tropical Plantation,** 1670 Honoapiilani Hwy. (✆ **800/451-6805** or 808/244-7643; www.mauitropicalplantation.com), a real working plantation that's open daily. A shop sells fresh and dried fruit, and a restaurant serves lunch. Admission is free; the tram

tours, which start at 10am and leave about every 45 minutes, are $14 for adults, $5 for kids 3 to 12.

BEACHES

About 2 miles from the pier is the long and wide **Kanaha Beach Park.** Because there are no lifeguards here, swimming is at your own risk, though the white sand and sweeping vista make lounging on the sand and dabbling your toes in the water enough of a reward. Kanaha has restrooms, showers, a picnic area, picnic tables, a campsite, and parking. Head up to **Hookipa Beach** to relax and watch windsurfers from around the world sail the waves. While not always safe for swimming, this is the best free windsurf stunt show in town. The beach has restrooms, showers, picnic tables, barbecue pits, and parking.

SHOPPING

A stroll along Wailuku's Main and Market streets presents a mixed shopping bag, but usually turns up a treasure or two. For made-in-Hawaii items, you can't beat the **Bailey House Museum Shop,** 2375-A Main St. (✆ **808/244-3326**), which has a remarkable selection of gift items, from Hawaiian music and books to exquisite woods, traditional Hawaiian games, *pareu* (a colorful wrap worn by Polynesian men and women), and prints by the legendary Hawaii artist Madge Tennent.

LAHAINA

COMING ASHORE One ship at a time can anchor offshore at the **Port of Lahaina.** A 10-minute tender ride takes passengers across the small harbor and alongside a pier right in the middle of town.

GETTING AROUND Just about everything you might want to do—from sightseeing to shopping, beaching, and diving—can be done within walking distance of the pier. If you want to venture farther, **taxis** are usually waiting at the pier; if not, call **Alii Taxi** (✆ **808/661-3688**) or **Sunshine Cabs of Maui** (✆ **800/922-8294** or 808/879-2220). Rates are $3.50 a mile.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Maui Tropical Plantation & Iao Gardens ($62, 3½ hrs.): A narrated 40-minute tram tour takes you around the beautiful Maui Tropical Plantation. From there, the tour continues on to Maui's most well-known and beautiful valley gorge.

Ulalena, Myth & Magic ($59, 3 hr.): This evening tour takes in a theatrical presentation about the mythic creation of the islands and the voyagers who have found their way here, from the first Polynesians to Captain Cook and on to the present day.

***Atlantis* Submarine Adventure** ($99 adults, $69 children, 5 hr.): If you don't scuba dive, this 65-foot, air-conditioned submarine is the perfect way to view the spectacle of marine life nearly 150 feet below the surface.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Lahaina (✆ **808/667-9193;** www.visitlahaina.com) is one of the most vibrant yet historic towns in Hawaii. It's rich in history, plus loaded with great shops, watersports facilities, and restaurants. Stop by the centrally located **Courthouse** to browse the two art galleries, grab a self-guided walking-tour pamphlet, or check out the historical exhibits at the newly opened (and free) **Lahaina Heritage Museum** (✆ **808/661-1959**), on the second floor. Just outside the Courthouse, artists are camped under a great banyan tree, the largest you'll likely ever see.

As you meander among the shops and sights, clearly numbered plaques correspond to the walking tour. Head for the two-story **Pioneer Inn,** 658 Wharf St. (✆ **808/661-3636**), which was Maui's first hotel; the bar remains a favorite watering hole. Then check out the nearby **Baldwin Home Museum,** 120 Dickenson St. (✆ **808/661-3262;** www.lahainarestoration.org), where a local missionary and medical doctor, Dwight Baldwin, single-handedly vaccinated and saved almost the entire town from a deadly smallpox outbreak in the mid–19th century. Admission is $3. Stroll farther down Front Street, heading west, and drop in at the **Wo Hing Museum** (✆ **808/661-5553**), once an ancient Chinese fraternal society. Admission is $1. While the museum merits only a quick tour, don't miss the film loop playing in the adjacent cookhouse—you can view footage of Hawaii shot by Thomas Edison nearly 100 years ago.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

In the Lahaina area, for a unique eating experience, try some local fare at **Aloha Mixed Plate,** 1285 Front St. (✆ **808/661-3322**). Nowhere else short of a luau can you try the local favorites such as *kailua* roast pork (a full pig wrapped in palm leaves and cooked in a fire pit with lava rocks for 12 hr.), *lomi lomi* salmon (fresh salmon minced with raw tomatoes and spices), *lau lau* (pork cooked with taro leaves that taste like fresh spinach), and, of course, the Hawaiian staple, *poi* (a locally beloved but flavorless goo made from taro root). The cultural experience is well worth the short taxi ride from nearby Lahaina. Main courses cost $5 to $14.

The **Maui Ocean Center,** 192 Ma'alaea Rd., in Maalaea, about 12 miles southeast of Lahaina (✆ **808/270-7000;** www.mauioceancenter.com), invites you to explore Hawaii's native marine life in a safe and enjoyable setting. This modern family-friendly facility is the largest tropical reef aquarium in the Western Hemisphere. It has both indoor and outdoor exhibits where you can go nose to nose with an octopus, watch a turtle swim, and even touch a squishy sea cucumber. Admission costs $25 for adults, $22 for seniors, and $18 for children 3 to 12.

To learn everything you ever wanted to know about whaling, head to the **Whaling Museum** in **Whalers Village,** 2435 Kaanapali Pkwy., Kaanapali (✆ **808/661-5992;** www.whalersvillage.com). This compact museum houses a prized collection of scrimshaw and lets you step into the world of whaling through an innovative, self-guided audio tour. Admission is free; open daily from 9am to 10pm. Kaanapali is the resort area just north of Lahaina, about 2 minutes away by taxi.

BEACHES

The beach at **Lahaina** is calm, clean, and a great place to watch new surfers take their first lessons on the baby waves. Located between a stone breakwater and the shops at 505 Front St., this beach is known by locals as either "505" or "the break wall." There are restrooms, shops, and restaurants nearby. **Kaanapali Beach,** directly behind **Whalers Village** (see above), is a safe and popular beach stretching about a mile past several resorts. Beach chairs, umbrellas, kayaks, boogie boards, and other rentals are available at **Snorkel Bob's,** 180 Dickenson St., #116 (✆ **808/661-4421;** www.snorkelbob.com), which also operates several other locations around the island.

SHOPPING

Front Street in Lahaina is a shopper's mecca, with clothing boutiques full of aloha (aka Hawaiian) shirts, jewelry stores selling pearls and tourmaline, and the usual assortment of galleries. The best art can be found at the **Lahaina Arts Society** galleries inside the Courthouse, 648 Wharf St. (✆ **808/661-0111**). Not far away on

Honoapi'ilani Highway is the **Lahaina Cannery Mall** (✆ **808/661-5304;** www.lahainacannery.com), which used to be a huge pineapple cannery; it now houses lots of shops carrying locally made handicrafts. **Whalers Village,** 2435 Kaanapali Pkwy. (✆ **808/661-4567;** www.whalersvillage.com) and **Shops at Wailea,** 3750 Wailea Alanui Dr. (✆ **808/891-6770;** www.shopsatwailea.com) are both shopping centers featuring upscale classics (Louis Vuitton, Tiffany & Co.), as well as more affordable standards, a la Tommy Bahama. They are also home to a number of restaurants.

4 The Big Island

Big surprise—the Big Island is the largest island in the Hawaiian chain (4,028 sq. miles—about the size of Connecticut), the youngest (800,000 years), and the least populated (with 30 people per sq. mile). It has an unmatched diversity of terrain and climate: fiery volcanoes and sparkling waterfalls, black-lava deserts and snowcapped mountain peaks, tropical rainforests and alpine meadows, a glacial lake, and miles of golden, black, and green (!) sand beaches. A 50-mile drive will take you from snowy winter to sultry summer, passing through spring or fall along the way. The island looks like the inside of a barbecue pit on one side, and a lush jungle on the other. In a word, it's bizarre, and takes some people aback because it doesn't fit the tropical stereotype.

Five volcanoes—one still erupting—have created this island, which is growing bigger every day. At its heart is snowcapped **Mauna Kea,** the world's tallest mountain (measured from the ocean floor), complete with its own glacial lake. Mauna Kea's nearest neighbor is **Mauna Loa** ("Long Mountain"), creator of one-sixth of the island; it's the largest volcano on earth, rising 30,000 feet out of the ocean floor (of course, you can see only the 13,677 ft. that are above sea level). Erupting **Kilauea** makes the Big Island bigger every day—and, if you're lucky and your timing is good, you can stand just a few feet away and watch it do its work. In just a week, the Kilauea volcano can produce enough lava to fill the Houston Astrodome.

HILO

COMING ASHORE Up to two cruise ships can pull alongside the docks at the **Port of Hilo,** which is not much more than an industrial port, so don't plan on walking into town. An organized shore excursion is your best bet here.

GETTING AROUND In the unlikely event there are no **taxis** waiting at the pier, you can call **Ace-1** (✆ **808/935-8303**). Note that because the island is so big, taxi rides can be quite expensive. Taxis are metered and start at $3; the first mile costs $5.60 and each subsequent ⅛ mile is 30¢.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

If the weather's good, you can't go wrong with a scenic helicopter tour over Kilauea volcano; there is also a variety of golf excursions offered on the Big Island. Otherwise, here are some of our favorite options.

Kilauea Volcano ($52 adults, $31 children, 4¾ hr.): Volcanoes National Park is, by far, Hawaii's premier tourist destination and well worth a visit. On your excursion, you'll get a look at the still-active Kilauea (5,000 ft.), walk the extinct Thurston Lava Tube, and check out the exhibits at the National Volcano Observatory. There's no need to worry about dramatic eruptions; for the most part, Hawaii's volcanoes are quite tame.

Kilauea Lava Viewing Hike ($119 adults, $109 children, 6 hr.): Drive 51 miles, climb 4,000 feet up Kilauea, and then descend to sea level to watch lava flowing into the sea. The land here is some of the newest on earth, formed by the cooling lava sometimes only hours before you arrive. It's often so hot that it'll melt the soles of your sneakers if you don't keep moving. This is one hike that's only for the really fit, requiring a 2- to 6-mile trek on rough surfaces. Many folks who start out don't make it and have to head back to the van without seeing what they came to see.

Waipi'o Valley Waterfall, Hike & Swim ($126, 7 hr.): There is no better way to appreciate the natural beauty of this sacred "Valley of the Kings" than by hiking all the way through it to the spectacular waterfall.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

To enjoy the beauty of a formal Japanese garden, head down Banyan Drive to **Queen Liliuokalani Gardens,** right near **Coconut Island.** This picturesque 30-acre park has many bonsai trees, as well as carp ponds, pagodas, and an arched bridge. To truly understand the power and fury of the Pacific Ocean, visit the **Pacific Tsunami Museum,** 130 Kamehameha Ave. (✆ **808/935-0926;** www.tsunami.org). Be sure to speak with the volunteers on hand, many of whom have lived through the "walls of water" that hit Hilo in 1946 and 1960.

To learn more about Hawaii's marine ecosystems, visit the **Mokupapapa Discovery Center,** 308 Kamehameha Ave., Ste. 109, in the South Hata Building (✆ **808/933-8195;** www.hawaiireef.noaa.gov). This education facility opened in 2003 and is run by the National Marine Sanctuaries and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Exhibits include a 2,500-gallon saltwater aquarium, a number of photographs and murals, and several interactive research stations. Admission is free; open Tuesday through Saturday 9am to 4pm.

BEACHES

At the start of Banyan Drive (about 2 miles from the cruise dock) is **Reeds Bay Park,** a small beach popular with locals. While there are no lifeguards or facilities here, the shallow water is well protected from waves and jagged rocks, making it ideal for swimming.

Near the other end of Banyan Drive is Moku Ola, or **Coconut Island.** Accessible by a walking bridge, this serene destination is also popular with locals who want to stroll the shady perimeter, bathe in the rocky pools, or swim off the small grassy beaches.

About 3 miles from the pier on Kalanianaole Avenue is **Leleiwi Beach Park.** Not a traditional white-sand beach, this one has black-lava rocks that form small tide pools, ideal for snorkeling. Keep an eye out for endangered sea turtles that are attracted to this spot. There are lifeguards here, and facilities include showers, restrooms, and a small marine police station.

SHOPPING

The best shopping in Hilo can be found along Kamehameha Avenue in the heart of downtown. Stop by **Sig Zane Designs,** 122 Kamehameha Ave. (✆ **808/935-7077;** www.sigzane.com), for the best in Hawaiian wear; **Basically Books,** 160 Kamehameha Ave. (✆ **808/961-0144;** www.basicallybooks.com), a sanctuary for lovers of books, maps, and Hawaii-themed gift items; and **Dragon Mama,** 266 Kamehameha Ave. (✆ **808/934-9081;** www.dragonmama.com), for unique comforters, cushions,

futons, meditation pillows, hemp yarns and shirts, antique kimonos and obi, tatami mats sold by the panel, and all manner of comforts in the elegantly spare Japanese esthetic.

KAILUA-KONA

COMING ASHORE Two cruise ships anchor offshore here; a 10-minute tender ride takes passengers to the sleepy pier in Kailua-Kona. There's plenty to do within steps of this modest pier, including beach-hopping, shopping, and more. Taxis line up at the dock to whisk you away, but with so much going on at the pier, there is little reason to leave.

GETTING AROUND As at the other ports in Hawaii, **taxis** await the arrival of cruise ship passengers, in this case lining up in front of the King Kamehameha Hotel. If you need to call for one, try **AAA-1 TAXI** (✆ **808/325-3818**); keep in mind, though, that because the island is so big, long-distance trips can be very pricey. Only two car-rental agencies send vans to pick up passengers at the pier. To book a car, contact (✆ **800/GO-ALAMO** [462-5266]; www.alamo.com) or **Enterprise** (✆ **800/736-8222;** www.enterprise.com) and someone will pick you up at the pier. To cruise the waterfront and around town, rent a bike for $20 a day at **Hawaiian Pedals** (✆ **808/329-2294**), in the Kona Inn Shopping Village about half a mile down on Alii Drive.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Catamaran Sail & Snorkel ($89 adults, $69 children, 4 hr.): Head out on a catamaran to Pawai Bay and enjoy a morning of cruising, music, snacking, and snorkeling. The bay is loaded with multicolored fish, rays, and lava-encrusted coral reefs. In winter, there's a great chance you'll see whales or spinner dolphins breaching and cavorting.

Big Island Helicopter Spectacular ($429, 4½ hr.): There is no better way to see the Big Island's beauty and volcanic fury than from a helicopter. On this journey, you soar over the tropical valleys and waterfalls of the Kohala Mountains, the rainforest of the Hamakua Coast, and the spectacular lava flows of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

There is plenty to see and do right near the pier. Just head down the seawall and enjoy the breathtaking ocean view on one side, and the endless stream of shops and galleries along the opposite side of the street. Be sure to stop in at **Hulihee Palace,** 75-5718 Alii Dr. (✆ **808/329-1877;** www.huliheepalace.org), a two-story New England–style palace. Built in 1838 as a summer residence for Hawaii's royalty, it was, at the time, the largest and most elegant home on the island. Today, it's a well-run and well-preserved museum. Admission is $6. Across the street is **Mokuaikaua Church** (✆ **808/329-1589**), the oldest Christian church in Hawaii (free admission; daily).

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

St. Benedict's Catholic Church, on Hwy. 19 (✆ **808/328-2227**), is more commonly known as the Painted Church because of the colorful murals and frescoes that cover its walls and ceilings. It was painted by Father John Velge, the church's first priest, in an attempt to enlighten and educate his congregation, who were predominantly illiterate. Admission is free.

Ancient **Hawaiian petroglyphs** can be seen near the **Kings' Shops** at the Waikoloa Beach Resort, just off Waikoloa Beach Drive about 30 miles north on Hwy. 19 (✆ **808/886-8811**). Free tours meet at the food court in the Kings' Shops Sundays at 10:30am (you must register in advance). You can also tour the ancient markings on your own at any time. Follow the signs to the petroglyphs; then take the small path that leads to a craggy trail through a lava field once used by Hawaiian travelers.

Nonguests are welcome to visit **Hilton Waikoloa Village,** 425 Waikoloa Beach Dr. (✆ **808/886-1234;** www.hiltonwaikoloavillage.com), and enjoy its spectacularly landscaped grounds and walkways that meander past enormous statues, dramatic waterfalls, sweeping coastal vistas, and $7 million worth of artwork. If you like Atlantis on Paradise Island in The Bahamas, you'll love this resort. Enjoy any of the nine restaurants, all reached via air-conditioned tram or open-air mahogany boats that run from one end of the property to the other. For a steep $80, families can use the pools and man-made beach as well (call first to make sure of availability on the day you're in port).

BEACHES

At the Kailua-Kona pier, you're practically standing on the beach at the **King Kamehameha Hotel.** Because all beaches are public in Hawaii, this small and sweet waterfront resort is yours to enjoy. For a fee, you can rent watersports gear, a lounge chair, or an umbrella. For those who prefer to swim without all the trappings, there is a miniscule scrap of beach just on the other side of the parking lot. Here, the calm water makes for great paddling, swimming laps, or just floating your cares away.

The best beach for snorkeling (especially for beginners) is **Kahaluu Beach Park,** about 5 miles down Alii Drive from the pier. The salt-and-pepper-colored beach is convenient to restrooms, a snack truck, and sheltered picnic tables. Although shallow, the water can become rough in the winter.

Beautiful **Hapuna Beach State Park,** past the Hilton Waikoloa Village and Mauna Lani Resort, is about 35 miles up the Kohala Coast from the pier. Follow the highway signs and turn left toward the ocean off Hwy. 19. You'll be greeted by a large white-sand beach. The area is serene and well maintained, and has a food pavilion, restrooms, and showers.

SHOPPING

There is ample shopping on Alii Drive, which starts at the Kailua Pier and extends southward along a nearly endless strip of small shopping galleries with similar names and equally similar wares. **Kailua Village Artists Gallery,** a co-op of four dozen island artists and a few guest artists, displays watercolors, paintings, prints, hand-blown and blasted glass, and photography at two locations close to the pier: at King Kamehameha's Kona Beach Hotel, 75-5660 Palani Rd. (✆ **808/329-6653**), and at 78-6740 Alii Dr. (✆ **808/324-7060**). Books, pottery, and an attractive assortment of greeting cards are among the lower-priced items. Other places to browse close to the pier are **Eclectic Craftsman** in the Kona Marketplace, 75-5729 Alii Dr. (✆ **808/334-0562**), for beautifully carved wood. Farther down, inside Waterfront Row, marvel at the marine-life sculptures made from wood, stone, and metal at **Wyland Gallery,** 75-5770 Alii Dr. (✆ **808/334-0037**).

15 New England & Eastern Canada

Back in the year 1614, the first successful American colony, at Jamestown, Virginia, was only 7 years old, and exploration of North America had just begun. No one yet knew just how vast the continent was, but Europe's great powers had already begun fighting for its bounty. To the north, the lands known as "Northern Virginia" caught the imagination of Jamestown founder John Smith, who mounted an expedition along the coasts of what are now Massachusetts and Maine. Returning to England with stories of the region's natural wealth, he argued strongly for its colonization and renamed it "New England," a name that King James I made official in 1620. A few years later, James's son, Charles I, sent a party of Scots to colonize the land even farther north, in what are now the Canadian Maritimes. And so it came to pass that, just as England has Scotland on its northern border, New England's nearest neighbor is beautiful Nova Scotia—the "New Scotland."

The legacies left by the English, Scottish, French, and other settlers who immigrated to these parts have lent ports along the New England/Canada coast their unique character, whether it's the Puritan ethics of stubborn independence and thriftiness that define many New Englanders, or the French culture and language that thrive in the Providence of Québec. On a cruise in this region, you'll see lots of **historical sites,** from Boston's Paul Revere House to Québec City's 17th-century Notre-Dame des Victoires Church to the Halifax Maritime Museum's *Titanic* exhibit. But you'll also get a dose of the region's inimitable character: fishing boats piled with netting, Victorian mansions built by wealthy ship owners, lighthouses atop windswept bluffs, and the cold, hard beauty of the north Atlantic sea.

The classic time to cruise here is in autumn, when a brilliant sea of **fall foliage** blankets the region. You can also cruise these waters in the spring and summer, aboard either big 3,000-passenger megaships or smaller vessels carrying less than a tenth that load. Depending on the size of the ship and the length of the cruise, itineraries may include passing through **Nantucket Sound,** around **Cape Cod,** or into the **Bay of Fundy** or **Gulf of St. Lawrence.** Some ships traverse the St. Lawrence Seaway or the smaller Saguenay River.

HOME PORTS FOR THIS REGION **New York, Boston,** and **Montréal** are the main hubs for these cruises, joined occasionally by **Québec City.**

LANGUAGE & CURRENCY English and dollars. Virtually all businesses in Canadian ports such as Halifax and Saint John accept U.S. dollars, though if you're spending time pre- or post-cruise in Montréal or Québec, you'll want to pick up some Canadian dollars, which at press time we valued at C$1 = US83¢ (US$1 = C$1.20). Exchange rates fluctuate, however, so prices may not be exactly the same when you arrive in port. Prices in this chapter are in U.S. dollars, unless noted.

New England & Eastern Canada

SHOPPING TIPS You don't go on a New England/Canada cruise for the shopping, though there are a few choice spots. Of course, New York, Boston, and Montréal, being major cities, have lots of shopping opportunities.

1 Bar Harbor, Maine

Bar Harbor is situated on the mid-Maine coast, overlooking Frenchman's Bay from its perch on the eastern shore of Mount Desert Island—its name an anglicization of Isles des Monts-Deserts ("bare mountains"), the name French explorer Samuel de Champlain gave the island in 1604. In its 19th-century heyday, Bar Harbor was one of the premier resort areas on the East Coast, attracting Astors, Vanderbilts, Rockefellers, and other wealthy families looking for rustic summer getaways. Today it's a humbler place, with no shortage of T-shirt shops and ice-cream parlors, but is no less popular with tourists.

Bar Harbor's biggest pull is its proximity to the lush **Acadia National Park,** which got its start in 1901 when millionaire George B. Dorr formed a preservation group and began buying up land, eventually turning over thousands of acres to the federal government. The park today covers most of the 12-by-16-mile island and a few neighboring islands, totaling some 35,000 acres of lake-dotted fir and spruce forests and surrounded by offshore waters that are great for whale-watching. Winding amid its acreage is a 57-mile network of carriage roads created by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., as well as 120 miles of hiking trails—all of them motor-free, open for walking and bicycling only.

COMING ASHORE While small ships less than 200 feet long can pull alongside the Town Pier, most ships must anchor offshore and send guests to the Harbor Place pier via tenders. The ride to the pier takes only about 10 minutes. The two piers are next to each other in the downtown waterfront area.

GETTING AROUND Once in town, you can walk along the waterfront and to many shops, restaurants, and a few attractions (highlighted below in "On Your Own: Within Walking Distance"), but to see Acadia, your best bet is signing up for one of your ship's shore excursions or renting a bicycle from a local dealer. Try **Bar Harbor Bicycle Shop,** 141 Cottage St. (✆ **207/288-3886;** www.barharborbike.com), or **Acadia Bike,** 48 Cottage St. (✆ **800/526-8615;** www.acadiabike.com). Rates are $15 for a half-day, $21 for a full day. If you want a taxi and there aren't any waiting, try **At Your Service Taxi Cab Co.** (✆ **207/288-9222;** www.atyourservicetaxi.com), which also offers guided tours of the park.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Best of the Park and the Town ($64, 4 hr.): Traverse the 27-mile Park Loop Road of Acadia National Park via bus, taking in spectacular coastal, mountain, and forest scenery. Tours include visits to Turrets Mansion overlooking Frenchman Bay, the summit of Cadillac Mountain, and Thunder Hole, where the right tidal conditions can send flumes of ocean spray high into the air.

A Walk in the Park ($44, 3 hr.): A naturalist guide leads a 2-mile hike along Acadia's trails and provides insight into the park's ecosystem, geology, natural history, and legends. The tour also includes a drive to the top of Cadillac Mountain for a 360-degree view of Mount Desert Island.

Acadia Carriage Ride ($79, 3 hr.): Fifteen-person horse-drawn carriages provide a chance to experience John D. Rockefeller's carriage paths in the way he expected you to. Approximately 1 hour is spent in the carriage itself. The tour also includes a drive to the top of Cadillac Mountain for the view.

Biking in Acadia ($49, 2½ hr.): Jump on a 24-speed mountain bike and follow the guide through the park's hard-packed gravel carriage trails that crisscross some of the most scenic areas of the park. The guide makes stops to discuss the island's history and lore.

Frenchman Bay Kayak Adventure ($59, 2½ hr.): This scenic paddle passes ocean-front mansions not visible from the road and provides great views of Cadillac Mountain. You also have opportunities to spot harbor seals, porpoises, and seabirds such as the storm petrel, shearwater, and northern gannet.

Whale-Watching ($56, 3½ hr.): This excursion allows visitors to view the humpbacks, finbacks, minkes, and dolphins that gather in the waters off the island between April and October.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

If for some reason you're allergic to beautiful forests and want to stay in town, you can check out the great views of the area from the foot of Main Street at grassy **Agamont Park,** which overlooks the town pier and Frenchman Bay. From here, set off past the Bar Harbor Inn on the **Shore Path,** a wide, winding trail that follows the shoreline for about half a mile along a public right of way. The pathway has views of many elegant summer homes (some converted to inns) and of **The Porcupines,** a cluster of spruce-studded islands just offshore. So named because they look like a group of porcupines migrating southward, the islands' distinctive shape—gently sloped facing north, with abrupt cliffs facing south—is the result of ancient pressure from a southward-moving glacier.

For a glimpse of the area's past life, stroll on over to the **Abbe Museum,** 26 Mount Desert St. (✆ **207/288-3519;** www.abbemuseum.org), a sprawling 17,000-square-foot gallery housing a top-rate collection of Native American artifacts. Admission is $6. Around the corner is the **Bar Harbor Historical Society,** 33 Ledgelawn Ave. (✆ **207/288-0000;** www.barharborhistorical.org), set in a handsome former convent dating to 1918. Its collection encompasses exhibits on old-time Mount Desert Island hotels and estates, photos of most of the 200 estate homes burned during the great fire of 1947, and a collection of milk bottles from the more than 40 dairy farms that were once active on the island. Admission is free; closed Sunday.

Somewhere during your stay, try some fresh **Maine lobster**—served boiled, baked, broiled, in rolls, and any other number of ways—at one of the many restaurants along the waterfront area. The fresh lobster bisque served at many of the local restaurants will warm you up nicely on cool autumn days.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

You don't want to come to Bar Harbor without getting a taste of the most famous attraction: **Acadia National Park (www.nps.gov/acad).** Sign up for a guided hike or drive along the 27-mile Park Loop Road, which wends around 1,530-foot-high Cadillac Mountain, the highest point on the Atlantic coast. If you luck out and there's no fog, expect awesome views of natural sights like Thunder Hole, where ocean surf dramatically crashes against granite cliffs. Perhaps the best way to really experience nature here is bicycling a stretch of the 55-mile car-free carriage trails that wind through the

park (rent a bike in town or sign up for one of your ship's biking excursions). Horse-drawn carriage rides are another popular way to tour. No matter what your transport, there's a great chance you'll spot some wildlife, from beavers, foxes, eagles, hawks, and peregrine falcons to the occasional moose.

SHOPPING You don't come here for the shopping (unless lobster potholders are your thing), though a handful of interesting shops on **Main Street** sell locally made and/or inspired handicrafts and gifts. At **Island Artisans,** 99 Main St. (✆ **207/288-4214;** www.islandartisans.com), you can browse for local handicrafts such as tiles, sweet-grass baskets, pottery, jewelry, and soaps. Down the street is the **Bar Harbor Hemporium,** 116 Main St. (✆ **207/288-3014;** www.barharborhemp.com), an interesting store dedicated to promoting clothing, paper, and other products made from hemp, an environmentally friendly, fibrous plant that's usually known for other reasons entirely.

2 Halifax, Nova Scotia

Perched midway up the Nova Scotia coast, Halifax is the top port of call for big ships on the New England and Eastern Canada circuit, owing to the city's natural deep-water port and its especially pleasing harborside setting and tree-lined streets. Its history goes back to the days of the Micmac Indians, who called Nova Scotia Chebuctook ("Great Long Harbor"). In 1605, the French staked their claim and renamed it Acadia ("Peaceful Land"). By 1621, the British had a foothold and renamed the land Nova Scotia ("New Scotland"), and in 1749 Edward Cornwallis founded Halifax, naming it for George Montagu Dunk, second earl of Halifax. Halifax eventually became a thriving shipbuilding and trading center as well as a military hub for the Royal Army and Navy. Even into the 20th century, it had strong military ties, serving as an important supply and convoy harbor in both World War I and World War II. In recent years, it's evolved into a vital commercial and financial hub, as well as home to a number of colleges and universities.

COMING ASHORE All ships dock right in town, with Halifax's attractions just steps away. Typically, two ships are in port at one time, though occasionally as many as four or five ships may be tied up. Be sure you're awake when your ship docks so you can go out on deck to hear the Halifax town crier and members of the 78th Highlander Regiment, who greet all ships with an exciting program of bagpipe and drum music.

GETTING AROUND Halifax is exceedingly walkable (there are free walking-tour maps available at the terminal), but there are also plenty of **taxis** at the docks if you're inclined to head for the hills.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Highlander Experience ($99, 3 hr.): Those who want an up-close-and-personal experience of 19th-century Halifax military life can sign up for this excursion offered at the Halifax Citadel, where participants are immersed in the duties and traditions of the Victorian Army and the Scottish Highlanders.

Treasures of the *Titanic* ($49, 2½ hr.): When the fabled liner *Titanic* sank on April 15, 1912, three ships from Halifax had the grim job of recovering victims from the icy waters 500 miles southeast. In all, only 335 bodies were found, of which 150 were later laid to rest in three Halifax cemeteries. This tour includes all aspects of Halifax's

connection to the tragedy, including the historic pier from which the ships were dispatched to pick up victims; the church where memorial services were held; the temporary morgue sites that housed the bodies of such wealthy victims as John Jacob Astor; the cemeteries where rows upon rows of identical gravestones mark the final resting place of 150 victims; and the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, which houses an excellent permanent exhibit on the disaster, featuring the world's largest collection of wooden artifacts—including a post from the famous Grand Staircase and one of the few intact *Titanic* deck chairs in the world.

Pub Crawl ($69, 2½ hr.): Led by a kilted guide and a bagpiper, this tour visits several of Halifax's favorite old-English-style pubs, with libations and music included.

Peggy's Cove ($49, 3½ hr.): For a glimpse of Nova Scotia's more rugged side, several different shore excursions head about 45 minutes south to the tiny fishing village of Peggy's Cove, in a picturesque setting on the eastern shore of St. Margarets Bay. Settled by six families in 1811, the village hasn't grown much since, but what it lacks in population it makes up for in scenic beauty, sitting on solid rock just above the crashing surf. A kilted guide leads a walking tour along the craggy coastline, with its bold glacier-formed outcroppings of granite rubbed smooth by eons of crashing waves, and past the town's impressive lighthouse, one of the most photographed spots in Canada. A longer version of the tour ($129, 6½ hr.) visits the 200-year-old hamlet at Fisherman's Cove and includes a lobster lunch at a local restaurant.

Tidal Bore Rafting Adventure ($199, 5½ hr.): The Bay of Fundy is home to what's probably the world's strongest tidal bore, when 2 billion gallons surge into the bay, creating waves up to 10 feet high. The trip is timed so you can watch the river change direction, creating the surge.

City and Harbor Duck Tour ($49, 1 hr.): Drive around to see the city highlights in an amphibious vehicle, then plunge into the harbor for views not possible from land.

Lunenburg Getaway ($64, 6½ hr.): Just southwest of Halifax, Lunenburg is Nova Scotia's main fishing port, with an Old Town that's been restored to its original colonial character. Tours include a 45-minute walking tour with free time to explore the town's shops and cafes.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Right at the cruise docks, **Pier 21** (✆ **902/425-7770;** www.pier21.ca) was Halifax's version of Ellis Island, where between 1928 and 1971 more than a million immigrants entered Canada. Opened as a museum in 1999, it provides an interactive experience that re-creates 43 years of immigrant life through displays, films, and sound clips. Admission is $7.

To the north, **Alexander Keith's Nova Scotia Brewery,** 1496 Lower Water St. (✆ **902/455-1474;** www.keiths.ca), offers one of the best brewery tours we've ever taken. Unlike the typical walk-through of a modern plant with a few historical exhibits, Keith's has restored significant portions of its plant to the way they looked when Keith established his business in 1820. Costumed actors take you through grain storehouses, historic brewing displays, and residential rooms en route to the 19th-century barroom for a sip (or two, or three) of Keith's brew. It's entertaining and fun, it's historical (Keith's is, after all, the oldest brewery in North America), and there's music to boot. Hour-long tours run every half-hour from June 1 through October 31 noon until 8pm (noon–5pm Sun). Admission is $13.

The Small Ports of New England & Eastern Canada

Aside from the major ports listed in this chapter, there are a number of smaller ports that small-ship lines such as American Cruise Line (p. 318), American Canadian Caribbean Line (p. 317), and Cruise West (p. 325) include on their itineraries. Big ships may also visit some of these ports, on occasion.

Block Island, Rhode Island (www.blockislandchamber.com): The Nature Conservatory has called Block Island one of the "last great places in the Western Hemisphere," an 11-square-mile Yankee gem. It has more than 300 freshwater ponds set amidst rolling green hills that end in dramatic 250-foot bluffs that look like the cliffs of western Ireland. A full third of the island is set aside as a wildlife refuge, accessible via 30-plus miles of hiking trails and cliffside bike paths. Down at the shore, the island is ringed by some 17 miles of beach.

Nantucket, Massachusetts (www.nantucketchamber.org): Just 30 miles off the coast of Cape Cod, Nantucket Island is classic New England, and was the worlds top whalin g hub before New Bedford stole the show. Today, it's vastly popular with summer tourists, but still manages to maintain a low-key attitude. Its main town, also named Nantucket, is all cobblestone streets, historic buildings, and yacht-filled harbor, while out around the residential island you'll find tranquil villages, rolling moors, heaths, cranberry bogs, and miles of exquisite public beaches, including Jetties near Nantucket Town and Surfside on the Atlantic coast.

Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts (www.mvy.com): New England's largest island, Martha's Vineyard boasts handsome old towns, lighthouses, white picket fences, and charming ice-cream shops . . . plus lots of summer visitors. You'll find great beaches (though many are private), as well as dramatic cliffs and meadows that make for great long walks and bicycle rides. The most genteel of the island's six towns is **Edgartown,** full of regal sea captains' houses and manicured gardens.

Fall River, Massachusetts (www.fallriverchamber.com/visitor): In the northern reaches of Narragansett Bay, about 20 miles north of Newport, Fall River allows visitors a chance to visit **Battleship Cove (www.battleshipcove.org),**

A few blocks north, the **Maritime Museum of the Atlantic,** 1675 Lower Water St. (✆ **902/424-7490;** http://museum.gov.ns.ca/mma), provides a window into the lives of Halifax's sailors and shipbuilders, its galleries displaying some 24,000 artifacts, 20,000 photos, and even whole vessels. Exhibits include an impressive collection of *Titanic* artifacts, and there's also a fascinating exhibit on the incredible explosion that leveled much of the city in 1917 when a French munitions ship collided with a Norwegian steamer. Admission is $7.25.

Up at downtown's highest point, about 9 blocks uphill from the waterfront, the star-shaped **Halifax Citadel** (✆ **902/426-5080;** www.pc.gc.ca/lhn-nhs/ns/halifax/index_e.asp) was built by the British between 1820 and 1856, mostly to guard against attack by the United States. The U.S. never did strike (it picked on Mexico instead),

a collection of preserved American warships including the USS *Massachusetts,* submarine *Lionfish,* and other veterans of World War II. At the town's Marine Museum, you'll find artifacts from the *Titanic,* while at the Lizzie Borden Museum, you can get the down-and-dirty details on that famous unsolved murder mystery.

New Bedford, Massachusetts (www.newbedford.com): In the 19th century, New Bedford was the whaling capital of the world. Today, it remains a major deep-sea fishing port, and boasts a beautifully restored waterfront area. The town's **Whaling Museum (www.whalingmuseum.org)** displays ship replicas, whale skeletons and paintings, glasswork, and scrimshaw, which is carved whalebone or whale ivory.

Portland, Maine (www.visitportland.com): Maine's largest city is set on a peninsula in scenic Casco Bay. The top attractions include the Portland Headlight (the oldest American lighthouse in continuous use) and the lovely Old Port neighborhood, a revitalized warehouse district that now boasts boutiques, restaurants, and entertainment along its cobblestone streets. Nearby Freeport is a town-size outlet center anchored by *très* Maine **L.L.Bean (www.llbean.com)**.

Sydney, Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia (www.cbisland.com): Nova Scotia's northernmost landmass, Cape Breton Island was principally settled by Highland Scots, and today that influence remains in the island's Scottish-style folk music. The island's scenic highlight is **Cape Breton Highlands National Park (www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/ns/cbreton/index_e.asp)** on the northwestern coast, and its spectacular highlands, dramatic cliffs, and ocean scenery are accessible via the 185-mile roadway known as the Cabot Trail.

Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island (www.visitcharlottetown.com): In Canada's smallest province, you can visit historic sites such as the house of Lucy Maud Montgomery, who wrote *Anne of Green Gables,* which describes the innocence and beauty of life on the island at the turn of the 19th century. You can also opt for a drive along one of the island's scenic highways that wend past sandstone cliffs, rocky coves, lovely beaches, and fishing villages.

but the ever-vigilant British still maintained a garrison here until 1906, after which it was manned by Canadian forces. Restored now to its mid-19th-century appearance, it's one of the most visited National Historic Sites in Canada, with costumed animators portraying a regiment of Scottish soldiers and their families. Visitors can see displays of weapons and uniforms, view audiovisual presentations and demonstrations by soldiers' wives, take an hour-long guided tour, enjoy panoramic views from its ramparts, and watch maneuvers and bagpipe concerts on the central parade ground. At noon each day, one of the fort's cannons is fired ceremoniously. Boom! Admission is $9.75 adults, $4.75 kids. To get here, head up Carmichael Street from Grand Parade Square/Barrington Street toward the old **Town Clock,** gifted to the city by Edward,

Duke of Kent, who commanded a garrison here in 1800. A staircase at the foot of the clock, on Brunswick Street, will take you to the Citadel's main entrance.

South of the Citadel, Halifax's famous 17-acre **Public Gardens** (www.halifaxpublicgardens.ca) make a beautiful spot to relax after a long walking tour. Created through the merger of the old Nova Scotia Horticultural Society Garden (laid out in 1837) and an adjacent public park opened in 1866, they're the oldest formal Victorian gardens in North America, and look much as they have since the 1870s. The best place to enter is via the ornate, Scottish-made wrought-iron gates at the corner of Spring Garden Road and South Park Street. Inside, winding gravel paths meander among the trees and flowerbeds, with exotic plants from around the world, commemorative statuary and fountains, and, at the park's center, a red-roofed gazebo built in 1887 to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

For information on **Peggy's Cove,** see "Best Cruise Line Shore Excursions," above. Nearer to Halifax is the **Fairview Cemetery,** where 120 *Titanic* victims were buried in 1912. At least one of your ship's organized excursions will generally include a stop here, with the guide explaining Halifax's role in the ocean disaster.

SHOPPING

Locally made maritime handicrafts such as hooked rugs, pottery, wood items, quilt work, and hand-knit woolens are big in Halifax. Because of the city's Scottish roots, you'll also find plenty of tartans and gifts made of pewter. There is no shortage of shops in and around the waterfront, including the **Historic Properties** (✆ **902/422-3077;** www.historicproperties.ca), a group of warehouses dating back to 1800, which have been converted into a shopping, dining, and entertainment complex. It's situated a little north of the Maritime Museum, with cobblestone streets leading between buildings that once held goods seized by privateers who plundered enemy vessels for the British Crown. Outside, street musicians and painters add a touch of the artistic; inside, you'll find fashionable shops, gifts, pubs, and lunch spots.

3 Newport, Rhode Island

Sitting on the southern tip of Aquidneck Island in Narragansett Bay and connected to the mainland by three bridges, Newport is practically synonymous with the term "idle rich." In the late 19th century, it was *the* place for America's wealthy aristocrats to spend their summers. From the Vanderbilts to the Astors, all the Gilded Age millionaires had summer mansions (or, as they called them, "cottages") here, each grander than the next, with an aesthetic that's half château, half Versailles, and 100% over-the-top opulence.

It's not difficult to understand how this picture-postcard seaside setting drew the elite. During the Colonial period, Newport rivaled Boston and New York as a center of New World trade, and during the Civil War it became home to the U.S. Naval Academy. After the war, the town began to draw wealthy industrialists, railroad tycoons, coal magnates, and financiers, who began to build the town's reputation as the center of the U.S. sailing universe. In 1854, the New York Yacht Club held its first annual regatta off Newport, and from 1930 to 1983, the club held the great America's Cup race here in "the City by the Sea"—stopping only after the cup was snatched by the Australian sloop *Australia II* following a 132-year American reign. Despite the fact

that U.S. boats won the cup back in 1987, 1988, and 1992, the race has never yet returned to Newport's waters, but the city continues to be a major sailing center, hosting more than 40 races each summer and fall.

Today, Newport has a beautiful sea, rocky coastline, and a bustling town that's all cobblestone streets, shady trees, cute cafes, and historical homes. Much of the hubbub is along the waterfront and its parallel streets: America's Cup Avenue and Thames Street, with the pronunciation of the latter Americanized from the British "tems" to "thaymz" after the Revolution. Though millions of people visit every year, Newport has managed to retain much of its small-town charm and hasn't been overtaken by T-shirt shops and fast-food outlets.

COMING ASHORE Ships both large and small are visiting Newport these days, all of them anchoring just a short distance offshore and shuttling passengers to the tender pier, just a block from the Newport Visitors Information Center at 23 America's Cup Avenue. An information kiosk is also often set up on the pier. You'll find all of Newport's most popular sights, including its famed mansions, within a short walk or drive of the downtown area.

GETTING AROUND From the tender pier, you can walk around the historic town or hop on the **Yellow Line/Rte. 67 RIPTA trolley** (✆ **401/781-9400;** www.ripta.com/content320.html), which visits the mansions, Bellevue Avenue shopping, the Cliff Walk, Rough Point, and other highlights. It'll cost you $5 for an all-day hop-on/hop-off pass, and you board it at the Visitor Information Center (see above). If you want a taxi to drop you off at the mansions, try **Yellow Cab Service** (✆ **401/846-1500**). Another great way to get around town and out to the mansions is by bicycle. One of several rental shops is **Ten Speed Spokes,** 18 Elm St. (✆ **401/847-5609;** www.tenspeedspokes.com), just a couple of blocks inland from the tender pier. Rentals are $5 per hour or $25 per day.

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Colonial Newport Walking Tour ($29, 1½ hr.): An expert guide takes you through a 10-block area of Colonial Newport, noted for nearly 200 restored 18th- and 19th-century Colonial and Victorian homes and landmarks. You'll walk along the city's quaint and shady streets where no buses are allowed, and hear how tobacco heiress Doris Duke and many other residents led the fight to rescue this once-neglected area. Stroll by the superb 1726 Trinity Church, architect Peter Harrison's Brick Market, the Touro Synagogue (the oldest in the country), the Quaker Meeting House, and the Old Colony House.

Guided Cliff Walk Tour ($34, 1½ hr.): You can walk Newport's famous Cliff Walk (see below) on your own, but this option comes with narration. Your choice . . .

The Vanderbilt's Newport ($64, 3½ hr.): This tour combines visits to two of Newport's grandest mansions: Cornelius Vanderbilt II's The Breakers and William K. Vanderbilt's Marble House. Another mansion tour, typically called **Grand Mansions of Newport** ($54, 3 hr.), visits The Elms or Rosecliff, the latter built in 1902 by architect Stanford White on the model of Versailles' Grand Trianon.

America's Cup Sailing Experience ($119, 2 hr.): Though Newport is not currently home to the America's Cup (as it was for more than 50 years), you can sail a 46-foot America's Cup yacht as part of this excursion, which sails past sites like the lighthouses, Newport Bridge, and some of Newport's lavish estates.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

This is a place for walking, if there ever was one. If you're reasonably fit, the famed mansions on Bellevue and Ocean avenues are within 1 to 4 miles of the tender pier, or you can take the trolley or a taxi (see "Getting Around," above).

Ten of Newport's grandest 19th-century mansions are operated by the **Preservation Society of Newport County** (✆ **401/847-1000;** www.newportmansions.org), which offers several **ticket packages** that combine admission to different houses. Admission to The Breakers, the most famous of the mansions, is $17. Admission to any of the others is $11. A combo ticket for The Breakers and any one other mansion is $23. For the ultimate, $49 will get you into The Breakers, Marble House, and The Elms, and add in the "Rooftop and Behind the Scenes Tour" at The Elms and lunch at The Elms Carriage House Cafe—though that's all a bit much to squeeze into your limited time ashore.

The Breakers, 44 Ochre Point Ave., east of Bellevue Avenue (✆ **401/847-1000**), is a 70-room Italian Renaissance–style palace built for Cornelius Vanderbilt II in 1895. Perched above the sea, it was designed by Richard Morris Hunt, the Beaux Arts master who also designed the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Highlights include the gilded 2,400-square-foot dining room (lit by 12-ft. chandeliers) and the great hall, which was designed to resemble an open-air Italian courtyard—right down to the 45-foot sky-blue ceiling.

While none of the other Newport mansions are quite as grand as The Breakers, several come close. **Marble House** was built between 1888 and 1892 for Cornelius Vanderbilt's younger brother William, making it the earliest of all the Newport mansions. Some $7 million worth of marble was used in its construction. **The Elms** was built for Pennsylvania coal baron Edward Julius Berwind in 1901, its stately design inspired by the Château d'Asnieres, a mid-18th-century home outside Paris. **Rosecliff** was built in 1902 for Nevada silver heiress Theresa Fair Oelrichs, designed by architect Stanford White after the Grand Trianon at Versailles. All the mansions are located off Bellevue Avenue, and tours run throughout the day.

Several other mansions are privately held and open to the public. At the **Astors' Beechwood,** 580 Bellevue Ave. (✆ **401/846-3772;** www.astorsbeechwood.com), daily tours are led by actors portraying the wealthy Astor family in the year 1891. Admission is $15. The 60-room **Belcourt Castle,** 657 Bellevue Ave. (✆ **401/846-0669;** www.belcourtcastle.com), was built from the inherited fortunes of August Belmont, the Rothschild Banking representative in America. Its current owners, the Tinney family, still reside here, opening their home daily to tours. Admission is $15.

The 3.5-mile **Cliff Walk** meanders between Newport's rocky coastline and many of the town's Gilded Age estates, providing a better view of their exteriors than you get from the street. Traversing its length, high above the crashing surf, is more than a stroll but less than an arduous hike. For the full 3.5-mile length, walk about a mile from the pier to the path's start at the intersection of Memorial Boulevard and Eustis Avenue. For a shorter walk, end at the Forty Steps (an access point between the path and the street), which is at the end of Narragansett Avenue, off Bellevue. If you want to do the entire Cliff Walk, but don't want to walk all the way back to the pier when you've reached the end, consider taking the trolley back. You can grab it on Bellevue, just 1½ blocks from the walk. Keep in mind that there are some mildly rugged sections to negotiate, no facilities, and no phones. A number of mansions, such as the Breakers, Rosecliff, Astors' Beechwood, Marble House, and Rough Point, are just on the other side of the walk; others are a few blocks inland from the path.

Just a few blocks from the pier, Newport's **Historic Hill** section contains one of the most impressive concentrations of original 18th- and 19th-century Colonial, Federal, and Victorian houses in America, many of them designated National Historic Sites. Spring Street, the hill's main drag, is an architectural treasure trove dominated by the 1725 **Trinity Church,** at the corner of Church Street. Said to have been influenced by the work of the legendary British architect Christopher Wren, it certainly reflects that inspiration in its belfry and distinctive spire, which can be seen from all over downtown. Not far away, **Touro Synagogue,** 85 Touro St. (✆ **401/847-4794;** www.tourosynagogue.org), is the country's oldest continually operating synagogue, dedicated in 1763. It's sometimes open for tours, charging a $5 admission. All around Historic Hill, you'll find homes marked with signs that read "NRF," denoting that they're among the 83 **18th-century houses** that were restored by tobacco heiress Doris Duke's Newport Restoration Foundation between 1968 and 1984. All are now owned and maintained by the foundation and rented privately. Historic Hill rises from America's Cup Avenue, along the waterfront, and runs inland to Bellevue Avenue. Walking tour maps are available in the "Preservation" section of **www.newportrestoration.com**.

Other Newport attractions include the Gothic **St. Mary's Church,** 12 William St. (www.stmarynewport.org), where John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Bouvier married, and the **International Tennis Hall of Fame,** 194 Bellevue Ave. (✆ **800/457-1144;** www.tennisfame.com), one of the few places in North America where you can play on a grass court. Museum admission is $10. To play on the grass courts, visitors must call ✆ **401/846-0642** and reserve in advance. Prices for play start at $90 per hour for two players.

SHOPPING

Lower Thames Street provides some quirky shopping opportunities, including stores that sell vintage clothing, salvaged architectural components, books, and sailing gear. **Spring Street** is noted for its antiques shops and purveyors of crafts, jewelry, and folk art. Spring intersects with **Franklin Street,** which harbors even more antiques shops in its short length. **Bellevue Avenue** also has a collection of resort-type boutiques—shopping in the true Newport style.

4 Québec City, Québec

Perched on a cliff top overlooking the St. Lawrence River, Québec City remains the soul of New France, an enormous territory that once included all of eastern Canada, the eastern U.S., the Great Lakes, and Louisiana, stretching from Hudson Bay in the north to Florida in the south. In 1608, the French explorer Samuel de Champlain was the first European to claim Québec City, and soon after established a fur-trading post. It was the first significant settlement in Canada, and today it is the capital of Québec, a politically prickly province almost as large as Alaska. The old city, a tumble of colorful metallic-roof houses clustered around the dominating Château Frontenac, is a haunting evocation of a coastal town in the motherland of France, as romantic as any on that continent. Because of its history, beauty, and unique stature as the only walled city north of Mexico, the historic district of Québec was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985—one of only three areas so designated in North America.

The city is split into two sections. The **Lower Town** (or **Basse-Ville**) is where the port is, while the **Upper Town (Haute-Ville),** the city's oldest section, dates back nearly 400 years and is still surrounded by its old stone walls.

Though some 95% of Québec's 167,000 citizens speak French, most people who work in hotels, restaurants, and shops also speak English.

COMING ASHORE The cruise docks at the **Port of Québec,** which includes a bustling commercial shipping operation, are within walking distance of the historic **Lower Town,** just outside the walled city. The **Upper Town** can be reached via a steep walk up the hill or the **funicular** (see below).

GETTING AROUND Virtually no place of interest is beyond walking distance, so your own two feet are definitely the best way to explore. Although there are streets and stairs between the Upper and Lower Towns, there is also a **funicular (www.funiculaire-quebec.com),** which has long operated along an inclined 210-foot track between the Quartier Petit-Champlain and the Terrasse Dufferin, up top. The upper station is near the front of the Château Frontenac, the majestic hotel that towers over the city, and Place d'Armes, a central square; the lower station is actually inside the Maison Louis-Jolliet, a small building with a big FUNICULAIRE sign at 16 rue du Petit-Champlain. It runs year-round daily and wheelchairs are accommodated. The one-way fare is $1.50.

Your best bet for getting a **taxi** is by finding a stand—such as the ones on the Place d'Armes and in front of the Hôtel-de-Ville (City Hall). Restaurant managers and hotel bell captains will also summon one if you ask. Fares are somewhat expensive given the short distances of most rides. The starting rate is C$3.30 (about US$2.75) plus C$1.60 (US$2.25) per additional kilometer. You should tip an additional 10% to 15%. To call a cab, try **Taxi Coop** (✆ **418/525-5191**) or **Taxi Québec** (✆ **418/525-8123**).

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

City Walking Tour ($54, 3 hr.): If you're up for it, the best way to discover Québec's historical side is by walking through the city's narrow cobblestone streets with a knowledgeable guide leading the way. Stroll along the first shopping street in North America, Le Petit Quartier Champlain, in the Lower Town. In the Upper Town, 3 centuries of history come to life in sites such as la Place d'Armes, la Terrasse Dufferin, Place de l'Hôtel de Ville, and le Musée des Ursulines. Some tours ($54) add a stop for high tea at the Fairmont Château Frontenac Hotel, Québec City's best-known landmark.

City Highlights by Bus ($39, 2½ hr.): Explore the narrow streets and stately residences that have hardly changed in more than 3 centuries. Enjoy panoramic views of the St. Lawrence River from the oldest part of town, drive through the Grande Allée neighborhood for a peek at the Victorian-era homes, and then on to the Château Frontenac landmark hotel, where there's time to explore. Finally, drive on to the Plain of Abraham, where the battle between the French and British armies eventually sealed the fate of the French colony.

Biking to Montmorency Falls ($79, 4 hr.): Peddle a mountain bike some 8 miles to Montmorency Falls, which plummet down a 272-foot cliff into the St. Lawrence River. Along the way, you'll pass the Québec Yacht Harbor and cross the St. Charles River to Domaine Maizerets, then ride along the St. Lawrence River for views of Québec's skyline and the Island of Orleans.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Spend a day strolling Québec City's hilly cobblestone streets, taking in their 17th- and 18th-century buildings, cafes, shops, and homes. Québec's Lower Town encompasses the restored Quartier Petit-Champlain, including pedestrian-only **rue du Petit-Champlain,** and **Place Royale,** home to the small **Notre-Dame-des-Victoires**

church, the city's oldest, dating from 1688. Petit-Champlain is undeniably touristy, but not unpleasantly so, with several pleasant cafes and shops. Restored Place Royale is perhaps the most attractive of the city's many squares, upper or lower. Also in Lower Town, the impressive **Museum of Civilization,** 85 rue Dalhousie (✆ **866/710-8031** or 418/643-2158; www.mcq.org), is an excellent interactive museum with rotating exhibits representing historical, current, and controversial subjects. Admission is $13.

The highlight of the Upper Town is the gorgeous **Fairmont Château Frontenac hotel,** rue St-Louis (✆ **800/828-7447** or 418/692-3861; www.fairmont.com/frontenac), a beauty set high above the St. Lawrence River. Colonial governors used to reside on the site, and in later years the likes of Winston Churchill and Queen Elizabeth II have stayed at the hotel, a turreted gem with slanted copper roofs, erected in 1883. Just walking around this amazing hotel is a treat, but do yourself a favor and linger for a drink to savor the aura. Fifty-minute guided tours are also available. Call ✆ **418/691-2166** for information.

Other popular attractions in the Upper Town include the outdoor **Parc-de-l' Artillerie,** 2 rue d'Auteuil (✆ **418/648-4205;** www.pc.gc.ca/artillerie), a fortification whose walls were erected by the French in the 17th and 18th centuries (admission $3.25), and the **Basilica of Notre-Dame,** 20 rue Buade (✆ **418/694-0665**), the oldest Christian parish in the Americas north of Mexico.

On a sloped hill just to the south of the Château Frontenac is the **Citadel,** 1 Côte de la Citadelle (✆ **418/694-2815;** www.lacitadelle.qc.ca), a partially star-shaped fortress begun by the French in the 18th century and augmented by the English well into the 19th century. Admission is $8.25. At the eastern edge of the Citadel, the **Terrasse Dufferin** is a pedestrian promenade that attracts crowds in all seasons for its magnificent views of the river and the land to the south, ferries gliding back and forth, and cruise ships and Great Lakes freighters putting in at the harbor below.

SHOPPING

Côte de la Montagne, which leads from the Upper Town to the Lower Town as an alternative to the funicular, has a few stores with more tourist-geared items and some crafts and folk art. The Lower Town itself, particularly the **Quartier Petit-Champlain,** just off Place Royale and encompassing the tiny streets of rue du Petit-Champlain, boulevard Champlain, and rue Sous-le-Fort (opposite the funicular entrance), has many shops selling clothing, souvenirs, gifts, household items, and collectibles. On the other side of the old city, a few blocks past Parliament down Grande-Allée, **avenue Cartier** has shops and restaurants of some variety, from clothing and ceramics to housewares and gourmet foods. The 4- to 5-block area attracts crowds of generally youngish locals, and the hubbub revs up on summer nights and weekends. The area remains outside the tourist orbit.

Dealers in **antiques** have gravitated to the cute **rue St-Paul** in the Lower Town, where they find everything from brass beds and Québec country furniture to knickknacks, paddywhacks, and 1950s U.S. kitsch. To get there, follow rue St-Pierre from the Place Royale, and then head west on rue St-Paul.

5 Saint John, New Brunswick

New Brunswick's largest city, Saint John sits along a sizable commercial harbor on the Bay of Fundy, at the mouth of the St. John River. Like Halifax, it was an important shipbuilding hub around the turn of the 19th century, and today its deep-water harbor can accommodate the world's largest cruise liners.

Don't expect a picture-postcard-perfect place overflowing with gardens and neat homes. Instead, Saint John is a predominantly industrial city, with large shipping terminals, oil storage facilities, and paper mills serving as the backdrop to the waterfront area. If you make an effort to look, though, you'll see that its downtown buildings boast some wonderfully elaborate Victorian flourishes, while a handful of impressive mansions lord over the side streets, their interiors a forest of intricate woodcarving—appropriate for the timber barons who built them.

The first Europeans to settle here were the French, when Samuel de Champlain led an exploration party into the Bay of Fundy and founded the first French settlement in North America in 1604. A hundred years later, the British were on the scene, capturing Saint John, which, in 1785, became Canada's first incorporated city.

COMING ASHORE Ships dock right at the **Pugsley Cruise Terminal,** in the industrial heart of the city, just steps from downtown.

GETTING AROUND If you haven't signed up for an organized tour, you can walk right into town or opt for a 1-hour city-highlights tour on the vintage bus-style trolleys or horse-drawn trolleys that meet the ship. **Taxis** queue up at the docks and work on set rates, depending on where you're going. If you need to call a taxi, try **Coastal Taxi** (✆ **506/635-1144**) or **Diamond Taxi** (✆ **506/648-8888**).

BEST CRUISE LINE SHORE EXCURSIONS

Historical Walking Tour ($29, 2 hr.): See the restored historic district known as Trinity Royal and the bustling City Market that survives from the late 1800s. A bus takes groups to the farthest destination, the Loyalist Burial Ground, where the walk starts. Gravestones there date as far back as 1784. Sights along the way include the beautiful brick town houses along Germain Street; the historic commercial buildings of Prince William Street, whose elaborate facades are decorated with gargoyles, pediments, and Ionic columns; the Market Slip, where thousands of American Colonists who remained loyal to the British Crown landed in 1783; and King's Square, designed in 1848 in the shape of the Union Jack to show loyalty to England.

Reversing Falls Rapids by Jetboat ($99, 3 hr.): Reversing Falls Rapids is a much-photographed spot where the Bay of Fundy meets the St. John River, and strong tidal conditions cause harbor currents to reverse. This large tidal swing means some 2 billion gallons of water surge into the bay twice a day—that's 2 *billion.* Near Fallsview Park, an underwater ledge 36 feet down causes a boiling series of rapids and whirlpools, and the rising tide slows the river current to a stop for about 20 minutes. The tour begins with an orientation drive through Saint John, stopping at the Old City Market (open since 1876). You then head to Fallsview Park, don life jackets and rain gear, and board your high-speed jet boat for a ride over and around the rapids. You can take a 20-minute jet-boat ride (referred to as the Thrill Ride) independently for just $30 by contacting **Reversing Falls Jet Boat Rides** (✆ **506/634-8987;** www.jetboatrides.com).

Bay of Fundy at Fundy National Park ($149, 7 hr.): This tour is the most in-depth exploration possible of Fundy Bay, whose huge tidal fluctuation makes it possible for tour participants to walk out on the ocean bed when the tide is out. This beach walk is augmented by a museum tour, with interactive demonstrations and exhibits, and a 1-mile walk along the Dickson Falls Trail, a lush relatively easy hike to a lovely waterfall. National park and local guides describe everything, and lunch is included. The drive to and from the park is also a great way to see the brilliant fall colors.

Canadian Beer Tasting & Saint John Highlights Tour ($59, 3 hr.): Heads up, beer lovers: This is your chance to sample Canadian beers and enjoy a famous local Irish pub, O'Leary's. Also included is a drive around the Saint John area, with time at the Old City Market, and a visit to the famous Reversing Falls.

ON YOUR OWN: WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Start your visit by wandering around near the waterfront, taking note of the gargoyles and sculpted heads that adorn the brick and stone 19th-century buildings. The Saint John visitor information board publishes several **self-guided walking tours** that will give you a great overview of the city. Text and maps are available for download in the "Day Trips & Guided Tours" section of www.tourismsaintjohn.com.

Of the handful of museums in Saint John, the important one to visit is the **New Brunswick Museum,** 1 Market Sq. (✆ **506/643-2300;** www.nbm-mnb.ca). Established in 1842, it's the oldest continuously operating museum in Canada. Exhibits include a marine mammals gallery whose focal point is "Delilah," the full skeletal remains of a 40-foot North Atlantic right whale that beached off Grand Manan in 1992. Other displays include local and Canadian art, the best collection of Loyalist artifacts on the North American continent, and the largest collection of ships' portraiture in Canada. Don't miss a peek at the cool tidal tube in the lobby. It's connected to the harbor, and water in the tube rises and falls with the tide. Admission is $5.

If the weather is disagreeable when you arrive, you can head indoors to Saint John's elaborate network of underground and overhead pedestrian walkways, dubbed **the Inside Connection.** Passages link the city's downtown malls and shops, two major hotels, the provincial museum, the city library, the city market, a sports arena, and an aquatics center. Another indoor option is the **Old City Market,** 47 Charlotte St. (✆ **506/658-2820**), a spacious, bustling marketplace crammed with vendors hawking cheeses, flowers, baked goods, meat, fresh seafood, and fresh produce. The market was built in 1876, and it has been a center of commerce for the city ever since. A number of vendors offer meals to go, and there's a bright seating area in an enclosed terrace on the market's south side.

ON YOUR OWN: BEYOND THE PORT AREA

If you don't sign on to one of the ship's shore excursions, you can walk to the **Reversing Falls Rapids** via the **Harbour Passage,** an interconnected system of walking and biking trails that wind along the waterfront from Market Square to the Reversing Falls, a distance of just under 3 miles. To immerse yourself in an even more natural side of New Brunswick, book an excursion or take a taxi to **Irving Nature Park,** Sand Cove Road (✆ **506/653-7367**), situated along the coast across the St. John River, less than 3 miles southwest of town. The park consists of 243 hectares (600 acres) of dramatic coastal scenery and as many as 240 species of birds have been spotted here. Soft wood-chipped trails and marsh boardwalks provide access to a lovely forest and wild, salty seascapes.

SHOPPING

You'll find art galleries, antiques shops, souvenir shops, and boutiques within a 10-minute walk of the cruise terminal, clustered around **Market Square, Brunswick Square, King Street,** and **Prince William Street.**

16

U.S. River Cruise Routes

In addition to sailing in the Caribbean, Central America, Alaska, Baja's Sea of Cortez, and New England/Canada, many of the small ships reviewed in chapter 8 also offer cruises on America's great rivers, visiting historic towns and sailing through gorgeous countryside that can take your breath away. This is your chance to experience some real 18th- and 19th-century-era Americana on waterways from the Hudson River and Erie Canal to the Columbia River. As these rivers cover a good chunk of the continental United States, and because each ship makes different stops along the way, we've limited ourselves to giving you a sort of "virtual float" along each river, with a sampling of the highlights seen on many regional cruises.

Unfortunately, the tough economic climate forced two river cruise lines to cease operations just before this book went to press. Majestic American Line and River-Barge Excursions had both offered trips on the **Mississippi River** system. California wine cruises have also suffered because of the current financial crisis, with no major lines at press time positioning ships there.

1 The Columbia & Snake Rivers, Pacific Northwest

The Columbia–Snake system is one of America's most important river systems, second to the Mississippi–Missouri in the size of the area it drains. The Columbia River flows 1,200 miles from the Canadian Rockies in southeast British Columbia into Washington, and then forms the border with Oregon on its way to the Pacific. The 1,000-mile Snake River starts in Yellowstone National Park and flows through Idaho into eastern Washington, where it meets the Columbia River.

The two rivers have served as the primary artery for east-west travel in the Pacific Northwest, used first by the Nez Perce Indians and later by Western explorers, fur traders, settlers, military expeditions, and missionaries. Settlers came in increasing numbers in the few years prior to the 1846 Oregon Treaty, and in 1859 Oregon became the 33rd state. Washington, once part of Oregon, was organized as a separate territory in 1853, and became the 42nd state in 1889.

Today, the Columbia–Snake corridor provides a fascinating trip into more varied landscapes than along any North American river. Beginning at the Pacific Ocean breakers, the river mouth near Astoria, Oregon, begins as a broad bay, narrows upriver to a more natural stream, and then squeezes dramatically through the deep **Columbia Gorge** (www.fs.fed.us/r6/columbia/forest). Thickly forested slopes rise to flanking high cliffs, while melting snow cascades into pencil-thin waterfalls. The river's surface is turbulent and the winds strong, but a series of dams built beginning in the Great Depression tames the flow into a series of separate pools. **Navigation locks** lift boats and barges while parallel fish ladders provide a bypass for salmon heading upstream to spawn, as well as for the young heading in the other direction, toward the Pacific.

Beyond the gorge, the land becomes drier, and with the right soil and an ideal climate, **vineyards** have burgeoned in Washington and Oregon to create the country's second-largest wine-producing region in the U.S. after California's. **Wildlife** is abundant, as hundreds of thousands of birds come to roost and nest, especially in the **Umatilla National Wildlife Refuge** (www.fws.gov/umatilla). By the time your ship reaches the Snake River, the land on either side shows few signs of habitation, instead rising from the waterline in layers of basalt laid down millions of years ago, forming multicolored buttes and mesas.

Portland, Oregon, a city of just over a half million (with another 1.5 million in its metropolitan area), is the embarkation city for nearly all Columbia–Snake cruises. The city has kept its local culture better than most, maintaining a vibrant, walkable downtown; preventing major expressways from slicing through its heart; and nurturing local businesses, including the dozens of microbreweries for which it's become famous. Known as the Rose City, Portland boasts 250 parks, gardens, and greenways, and since 1907 has celebrated the annual **Portland Rose Festival** (www.rosefestival.org) for several weeks each June, with an extravagant floral parade, music, car and boat races, and visits by U.S. Navy ships.

The city's core is **Pioneer Courthouse Square** (www.pioneercourthousesquare.org), whose modern architecture still manages to convey an old-time-city-square feel. It's surrounded by stores, offices, restaurants, and hotels, and hosts some 300 concerts and other events each year. A half mile to the northwest, in the city's Old Town neighborhood, the **Saturday Market** (www.saturdaymarket.org) is a huge draw for its open-air handicrafts, clothing, and jewelry stalls. Nearby, the **Portland Classical Chinese Garden** (www.portlandchinesegarden.org) is one of only a few in North America, taking up a walled block in Chinatown. Stepping through the gate feels like walking into an entirely different world, with pavilions, bridges, walkways, hundreds of native Chinese plant species, and a teahouse arranged around a central reflecting pond. About 10 blocks southwest, **Powell's Books** (www.powells.com) is the world's largest independent bookstore, with new and used books shelved together in a warren of rooms spread over three floors and a whole city block.

High up and to the west of downtown, Washington Park's terraced **International Rose Test Garden** (www.rosegardenstore.org) displays 557 varieties of roses, usually at their blooming peak during June and July and again in September and October. Just up the hill, the park's 5½-acre **Japanese Garden** (www.japanesegarden.com) is one of the finest of its type outside Japan, with walking paths leading among streams, ponds, Japanese flora, and five distinct gardens representing classical Japanese styles. The views of **Mount Hood** from both the Japanese and Rose gardens are spectacular.

Upon leaving Portland, cruises sail overnight downriver to where the widening Columbia meets the Pacific Ocean and call at **Astoria,** Oregon, tying up at a pier adjacent to the Columbia Bar lightship *Columbia* and Coast Guard cutter *Steadfast,* both of which are open for visitors. The **Columbia River Maritime Museum** (www.crmm.org) is part of the pier complex, exhibiting the history of Columbia River trade in ship models, drawings, and photographs. Don't miss the 20-minute walk up Coxcomb Hill to the 125-foot **Astoria Column,** which dominates the landscape from its 600-foot elevation. Erected in 1926 to mark the location of the first permanent American settlement west of the Rockies, it was designed by New York architect Electus D. Litchfield after Trajan's Column in Rome. Italian artist Attilio Pusterla created a bas-relief mural that scrolls around the column to depict the history of the town. The views here are extraordinary, both from the top of the column and from the property around it.

Whither the Mississippi?

How's this for a metaphor for our current economic times: Trade (or at least cruise trade) on America's greatest commercial river has all but come to a halt. For perhaps the first time since the early 19th century, there are no river ships offering full-service overnight cruises on the Mississippi or its tributaries—and no one is jumping in to fill the void.

The big blow, of course, came with the shuttering of **Majestic America Line** in November 2008. By itself, that company accounted for approximately 85% of the overnight river cruise trade on the Mississippi River system, which encompasses not just the Mississippi itself but also the Atchafalaya, Arkansas, Ohio, Tennessee, Cumberland, Missouri, and Illinois rivers (see map on the inside front cover of this book). A further blow came 1 month later when **RiverBarge Excursions,** operator of the 198-passenger barge vessel *River Explorer,* announced it was closing up shop due to low demand and rising costs.

Majestic America's end was particularly troubling because of its history. Though it was only formed in 2006, it was a successor entity to two other steamboat operators, America West Steamboat Company and the fabled **Delta Queen Steamboat Company,** which traced its history back to 1890 and had as its flagship the great *Delta Queen,* a vintage 1927 paddle-wheeler that for decades was the only wooden riverboat left on the Mississippi. At this writing, Majestic America's *American Queen* and *Mississippi Queen* were both laid up awaiting a buyer, while *Delta Queen* was operating on an allegedly temporary basis as a floating hotel and tourist attraction in Chattanooga, Tennessee (www.deltaqueenhotel.com).

Though true "sleep on the boat" overnight service had as of mid-2009 ceased on the Mississippi, many options still exist for day cruises, evening cruises, and even a few pseudo-overnight cruises, with accommodations at a shoreside hotel sandwiched between days on the river. Here's a rundown of a few of the better options. Due to their brevity, day cruises typically cost between $15 and $30. Overnights range from about $100 to $300.

Organized excursions head downriver to **Fort Clatsop** (www.nps.gov/lewi/planyourvisit/fortclatsop.htm), where Lewis and Clark spent 4 wet winter months in 1805 and 1806. A historically accurate re-creation of their fort is on-site. Another stop, the popular seaside resort of **Cannon Beach,** offers a wooden weathered-cedar shopping district with typical craft-type boutiques.

Longview, Washington, gives access to **Mount St. Helens** (www.fs.fed.us/gpnf/mshnvm), the site of the May 18, 1980, volcanic eruption that in minutes reduced the mountain's height by about 1,000 feet. The drive uphill winds through increasingly scarred hillsides covered in lava, ash, mud, and 150 square miles of destroyed forest to an interpretive center overlooking the cloud-enshrouded mountaintop and deep into a valley wasteland.

Bonneville Dam (www.nwp.usace.army.mil/op/b), dedicated by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1937, signaled the first major WPA undertaking by the

- ***Julia Belle Swain*** (www.juliabelle.com): Built in 1971 in Dubuque, Iowa, *Julia Belle Swain* is one of the few authentic steam-powered passenger vessels in operation on the Mississippi. She offers day cruises from Riverside Park in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and also does overnight cruises to Winona, Minnesota; Lansing, Iowa; and Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, with passengers spending their nights at hotels on shore. Occasional multiday cruises sail to more distant river cities, such as Dubuque, Iowa, or Red Wing and Wabasha, Minnesota.
- ***Spirit of Peoria*** (www.spiritofpeoria.com): The traditional-style boat was built in Paducah, Kentucky, in 1988 by Walker Boat Yard, and is solely propelled by its large stern paddle wheel. She offers day, overnight, and 2-night cruises, with overnight accommodations at shoreside lodges. She sails from Illinois and Missouri.
- **Riverboat *Twilight*** (www.riverboattwilight.com): Built in Jennings, Louisiana, and launched in 1987, this diesel-driven paddle-wheeler offers an overnight riverboat cruise from Le Claire to Dubuque, Iowa, with evening accommodations ashore.
- ***Belle of Louisville*** (www.belleoflouisville.org): Built in 1914 in Pittsburgh, the *Belle of Louisville* is a National Historic Landmark vessel that operates day sightseeing and dinner cruises along the Ohio River, from downtown Louisville, Kentucky.
- ***Natchez*** (www.steamboatnatchez.com): The steamboat *Natchez* is another traditional classic, also operating under old-fashioned steam power. She offers day cruises from New Orleans, boarding at the foot of Toulouse Street in the French Quarter.
- ***Creole Queen*** (www.creolequeen.com): Also sailing day cruises from New Orleans, *Creole Queen* is a traditional-style paddle-wheeler powered by very untraditional diesel engines. She was built in 1983 in Moss Point, Mississippi.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to create a safe passage through the Cascade Rapids. The dam created 48-mile-long Lake Bonneville, and its hydroelectric plants generate enough power to light 40,000 homes. The visitor center screens a slide film showing the dam under construction and describing how the salmon fish ladders work.

Upriver, the **Columbia Gorge Discovery Center** (www.gorgediscovery.org) exhibits the area's history and geology, revealing how the Columbia Gorge was formed by violent volcanic upheavals and raging floods, as well as the building of the Columbia River Scenic Highway, which leads to Multnomah Falls. An exhibit illustrates how Lewis and Clark equipped their expedition.

About 6,000 feet up the slopes of 11,245-foot **Mount Hood** stands **Timberline Lodge** (www.timberlinelodge.com), a timber-and-stone hotel hand-built in 1936 and 1937 by unemployed craftsmen hired by the WPA. It was dedicated in September 1937 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The view is north to 12,307-foot Mount

Adams, part of a line of volcano-formed mountains that include Mount St. Helens and Mount Rainier.

At **The Dalles Lock & Dam,** an excursion crosses the river to **Maryhill Museum of Art** (www.maryhillmuseum.org), set high above the river in Washington. A Midwestern Quaker pacifist named Samuel Hill, son-in-law of James J. Hill of the Great Northern Railroad, established the museum in the late 1920s. It now exhibits Russian Orthodox icons, Rodin sculptures, a collection of 250 chess sets, Queen Marie of Romania's royal regalia, miniature fashion costumes on stage sets, and Native American clothing, baskets, and weapons. Four miles east of the museum, just off Washington Scenic Route 14, is a full-scale **replica of Stonehenge** built by Sam Hill as a monument to Klickitat County soldiers who lost their lives in World War I.

Stops in **Pendleton,** Oregon, may include a visit to the grounds of the annual September **Pendleton Round-Up** (www.pendletonroundup.com) for a presentation of rodeo riding, country music, flintlock rifle firing, and other activities. In town, **Pendleton Underground** (www.pendletonundergroundtours.org) is an odd tour centered around a huge warren of tunnels dug by Chinese laborers in the 19th century. The Chinese lived and ran businesses here entirely underground, while some areas of the complex were used as bars, opium dens, and, later, Prohibition-era speakeasies. Elsewhere in town, the **Tamástslikt Cultural Institute** (www.tamastslikt.com) presents a variety of Native American traditions, including dancing, drumming, and storytelling. Exhibits include horse regalia, war bonnets, bows, and demonstrations of saddle making. Nearby, the **Fort Walla Walla Museum** (www.fortwallawallamuseum.org) exhibits a collection of carefully restored and re-created historic buildings that include a schoolhouse, doctor's office, railroad station, and houses arranged in a closed compound. Other buildings house farm equipment and a fire engine once drawn by a 33-mule team.

Finally, after passing through four **Snake River locks and dams,** your ship reaches the end of deep-water navigation at the border towns of Lewiston, Idaho, and Clarkston, Washington, 465 miles upriver from the Pacific Ocean. From here, an all-day **jet boat ride** heads into **Hells Canyon,** Idaho (www.hellscanyonvisitor.com), a National Recreation Area. The Snake River starts out sluggish, but soon becomes a fast-flowing stream of twisting rapids with 20-mph currents. The high bluffs and mountains on either side increase in height, creating a canyon 7,900 feet deep—1,900 feet deeper than the Grand Canyon. Passengers are likely to see bighorn sheep standing still on rocky ledges, mule deer down by the water, eagles and osprey overhead, and Nez Perce Indian petroglyphs depicting bighorn sheep inscribed on the flat rock surfaces.

LINES SAILING THESE ROUTES **Cruise West** (p. 325), **Lindblad Expeditions** (p. 335), and **American Safari Cruises** (p. 324) offer cruises here in the spring and/or fall.

2 The Hudson River, Erie Canal & Great Lakes

Inland cruises in the U.S. Northeast sail waterways such as the Hudson River, the Erie Canal, the St. Lawrence Seaway, and the Great Lakes, mixing and matching among these waterways to create itineraries of a week to 12 days. Most ships sail from New York City.

UP THE HUDSON

The navigable portion of the **Hudson River** (www.hudsonriver.com) extends through New York for about 150 miles, from Manhattan to Albany and Troy. The river is

considered to be an estuary, as tidal effects reach the base of the canal locks above Albany, and saltwater content extends about 60 miles northward from Manhattan and even farther during long periods of dry weather. On a cruise, one gets superb water-level views of the Hudson Valley, the towering New Jersey Palisades, the rugged Hudson Highlands, sprawling country estates, and the mighty fortress at West Point.

Leaving from **Manhattan**'s west side, ships skirt the majestic skyline and pass under the two-level George Washington Bridge. Rising on the New Jersey side is **Palisades Interstate Park** (www.njpalisades.org), an especially beautiful scene during fall foliage season. Fishermen will be out in force on weekends, as it's once again safe to eat the catch (though everyday consumption is not recommended). After passing Yonkers, the Hudson widens into the Tappan Zee, passing under the **Tappan Zee Bridge** carrying the New York State Thruway north to Albany and west to Buffalo.

Looking carefully, one may glimpse **Washington Irving's house** in the Hudson Valley town of Sunnyside; Tarrytown's Victorian Gothic **Lyndhurst Castle,** owned by the National Trust for Historic Preservation; and **Philipsburg Manor,** a 17th-century Dutch farming complex in the town of Sleepy Hollow. From the decks, you get a long-range view north to the Hudson Highlands, and at Ossining, the stone walls of **Sing Sing Prison** parallel the river. Information on all these attractions can be found online at **www.hudsonvalley.org**.

As your ship approaches Bear Mountain State Park on the left and the Bear Mountain Bridge, a flag rises above the trees marking the rustic **Bear Mountain Inn** (www.visitbearmountain.com), built in 1915. The river becomes noticeably narrower, and the channel under the Bear Mountain suspension bridge deepens dramatically to over 300 feet as the surrounding land rises steeply.

On the cliff tops opposite, the grounds of the United States Military Academy at **West Point** (www.usma.edu) begin, marked first by officers' houses, then the Hotel Thayer, and finally the gray-stone fortress-style buildings. At the base of the cliff, a launch docked near West Shore Line station brings cadets and officers across the Hudson to Garrison station for trains to New York. The colorful cluster of wooden Victorian buildings across the street from the Garrison depot served as the setting for Dolly's return to Yonkers in the film *Hello Dolly.* Most cruises stop at West Point for tours of the academy and historic Hudson Valley homes.

Rising beside the river are the grassy grounds and yellow Federal-style buildings of **Boscobel** (www.boscobel.org), a museum of early American furniture and decorative arts. Nearby, the 18th- and 19th-century river town of **Cold Spring** is full of restaurants (including the **Hudson House Inn;** www.hudsonhouseinn.com), antiques shops, and collectibles stores. If you come back on your own, it also makes a good base for hiking the Hudson Highlands.

North of Cold Spring is **Bannerman's Island** (www.bannermancastle.org), on which you'll find a mock 19th-century Scottish-style castle and estate built as a munitions warehouse and country retreat. They were destroyed in a huge fire in 1974, leaving behind the stabilized ruins one sees today.

At **Poughkeepsie,** nearby sites include **Franklin Roosevelt's Hyde Park house** (www.nps.gov/hofr/hofrhome.html), with Eleanor's cottage a short distance away; and the **Culinary Institute of America** (www.ciachef.edu), one of the leading U.S. cooking schools.

The Hudson passes numerous **lighthouses** and small river towns en route to Albany, the New York state capital, dominated by Nelson Rockefeller's 98-acre,

Internationalist-style **Empire State Plaza,** with its glass-and-marble office towers; reflecting pools; and huge, egg-shaped arts and conference center known as "The Egg" (www.theegg.org). Not all cruises come this far, and those that do (the ACCL ships) simply pass by to begin their trek through the Erie Canal.

INTO THE ERIE CANAL

The Erie's highlights are the **Waterford Flight** of five locks (which lift ships a total of 150 ft.), old factory towns such as Amsterdam and Little Falls, and the 22-mile Oneida Lake crossing. From Syracuse to Buffalo, ships pass through **Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge** (www.fws.gov/r5mnwr) for possible sightings of bald eagles and Canada geese, past restored canal towns such as Fairport and Pittsford, and through the original canal's small locks and stone-arched aqueducts. These last structures were built by Frederick Law Olmsted, whose most famous work is New York's Central Park. Turning into the Oswego Canal, the vast expanse of **Lake Ontario** is ahead, and soon one is threading among the beautiful **Thousand Islands** (www.thousandislands.com). Stops are made at Clayton's **Antique Boat Museum** (www.abm.org) and **Upper Canada Village** (www.uppercanadavillage.com), whose houses, churches, and public and farm buildings span 100 years of Canadian architecture and small-town life. Small ships share the **St. Lawrence Seaway** with huge lake carriers and pass through locks to Montréal for a stop and a landing at Bay of Eternity in the dramatic **Saguenay fjord.** From here, your ship typically returns upriver to debark at **Québec City** (see chapter 15).

THE GREAT LAKES

Until the mid-1960s, the **Great Lakes** were popular summer cruising grounds for Canadian and U.S.-flag ships, some of which dated from before World War I. When these ships went out of service, the industry died until American Canadian Caribbean Line started offering cruises here again in the late 1990s. A great idea, but the lakes are large bodies of water, and small, shallow-draft coastal cruisers like these can get bounced around during summer storms. In the last few years, German line **Hapag-Lloyd** (www.hl-cruises.com) has begun offering cruises aboard the 14,903-ton, 420-passenger *C. Columbus,* a more stable oceangoing cruise ship. While she caters mainly to German-speaking passengers, her Great Lakes cruises, offered in September and October, are bilingual, with announcements, menus, programs, and shore excursions provided in English.

Great Lakes itineraries are varied and may begin in any number of ports, such as Toronto, Windsor/Detroit, or Chicago. The following ports-of-call sampling will give you some idea of what there is to be seen.

Cruises originating at Toronto will pass from Lake Ontario through the **Welland Canal** locks to Lake Erie, and an excursion will run to **Niagara Falls** (www.tourismniagara.com), including a wet boat trip on the *Maid of the Mist* to the base of the falls.

As you pass into Lake Huron, you'll see **Tobermory** (www.tobermory.org), a fishing port settled by Scots in the early 19th century and the center for a resort region in the beautiful island-studded Georgian Bay. Michigan's **Mackinac Island** (www.mackinacisland.org) is entirely car-free and a popular summer resort. Its centerpiece, the venerable **Grand Hotel** (www.grandhotel.com), is one of the great hotels of North America, built in the 1890s and still maintaining its high standards. **Sault Ste. Marie,** strategically placed between lakes Huron and Superior, is the site for the **Soo Locks,** transited on some cruises that sail into the largest of the lakes. The scenic **Algoma**

Central rail excursion (www.agawacanyontourtrain.com) from the Soo into the North Country's Agawa Canyon is highly recommended.

Large cities featured on all cruises in this region include **Detroit** for the incredible **Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village** (www.thehenryford.org); **Milwaukee** for its German heritage and art museum; and **Chicago** for its outstanding architecture, lakefront skyline, museums, neighborhoods, and the Chicago River.

LINES SAILING THESE ROUTES **American Cruise Lines** (p. 318) and **Cruise West** (p. 325) offer Hudson River cruises that sail round-trip from New York City. **American Canadian Caribbean Line** (p. 317) uses the Hudson to reach the Erie Canal for the passage across New York State to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Valley. It also provides Great Lakes cruises from Chicago.

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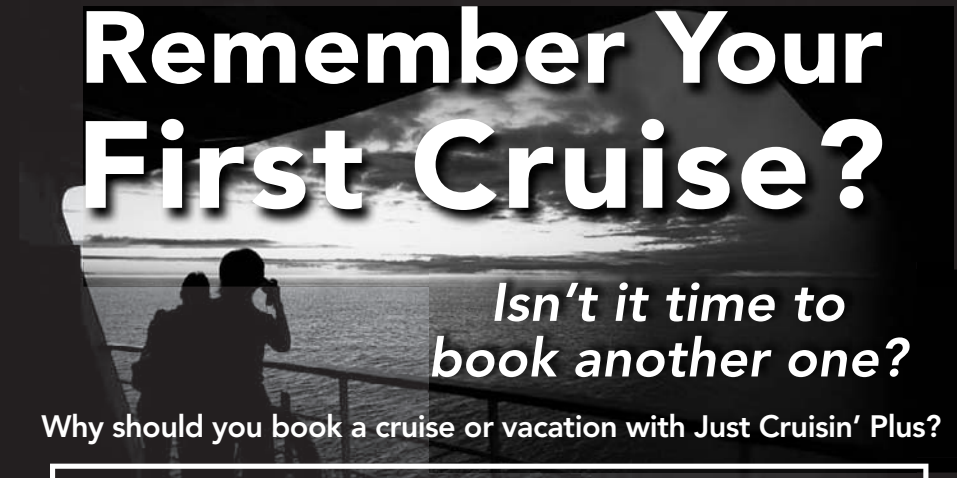

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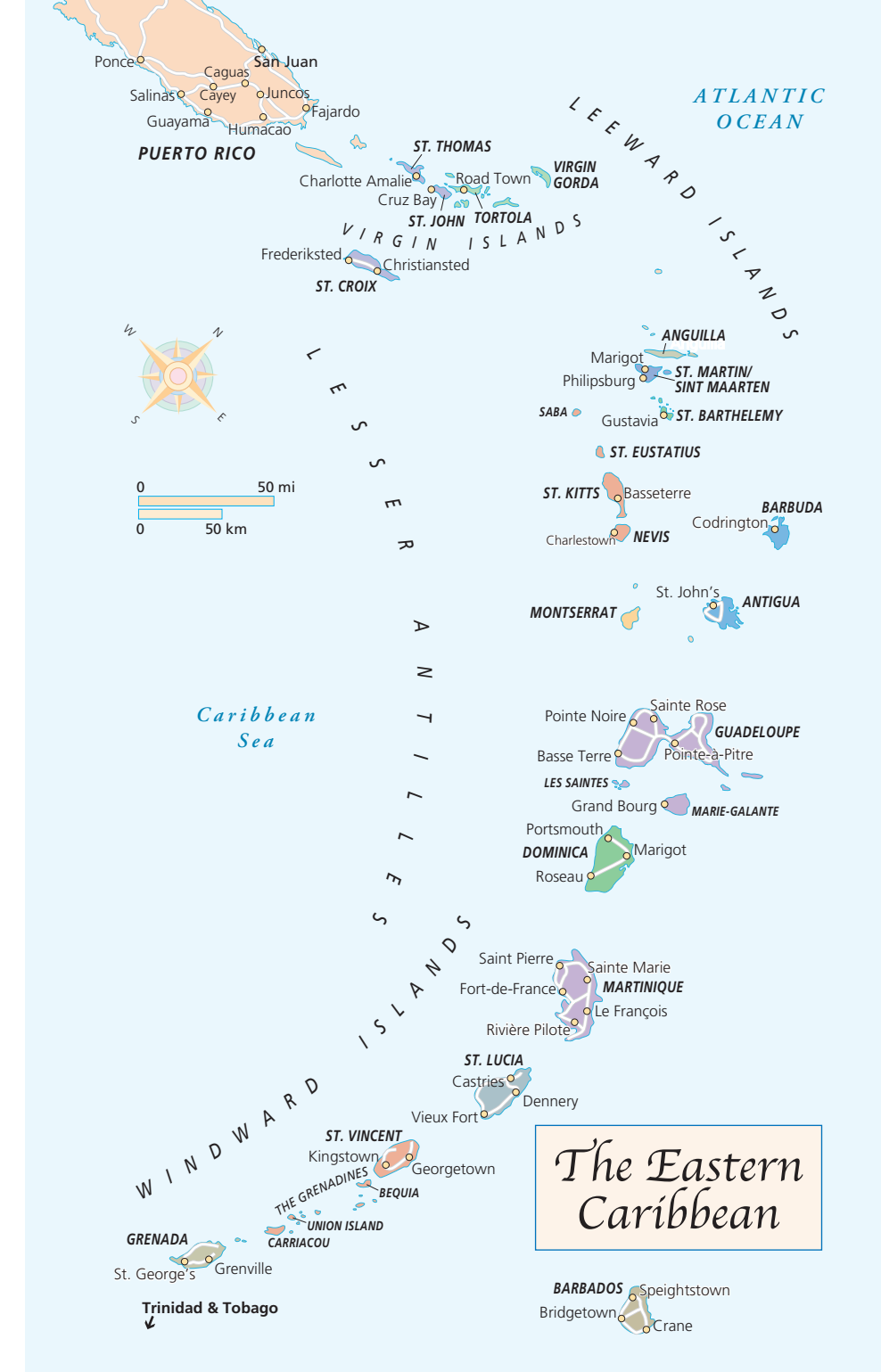
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Cruz Bay
ST. JOHN
TORTOLA
VIRGIN ISLANDS
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Christiansted
ST. CROIX
ANGUILLA
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NEVIS
St. John's
MONTSERRAT
ANTIGUA
LESSER ANTILLES
Caribbean Sea
Pointe Noire
Sainte Rose
GUADELOUPE
Basse Terre
Pointe-à-Pitre
LES SAINTES
Grand Bourg
MARIE-GALANTE
Portsmouth
DOMINICA
Marigot
Roseau
Saint Pierre
Sainte Marie
Fort-de-France
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Rivière Pilote
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Dennery
Vieux Fort
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ST. VINCENT
Kingstown
Georgetown
THE GRENADINES
BEQUIA
UNION ISLAND
CARRIACOU
GRENADA
St. George's
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